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- VIGIER ELECTRIC
- ORANGE HEAD AND CAB
- SIMON & PATRICK ACOUSTICS
- HBE PEDALS
- MANSON BASS

Guitar

& BASS MAGAZINE

Guitar LIVING LEGENDS

The wisdom of Richard Thompson

England's greatest living guitarist on:

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- Songwriting
- Recording

INTERVIEW

Joe Satriani

New album, new gear

PLUS

Glen Matlock

Heavy Trash

INTERVIEW

Dave Mustaine

Falling on 'Deth ears

PLAY LIKE

Martin Turner

Bass Workshop

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December 2010 Vol 22 No 02

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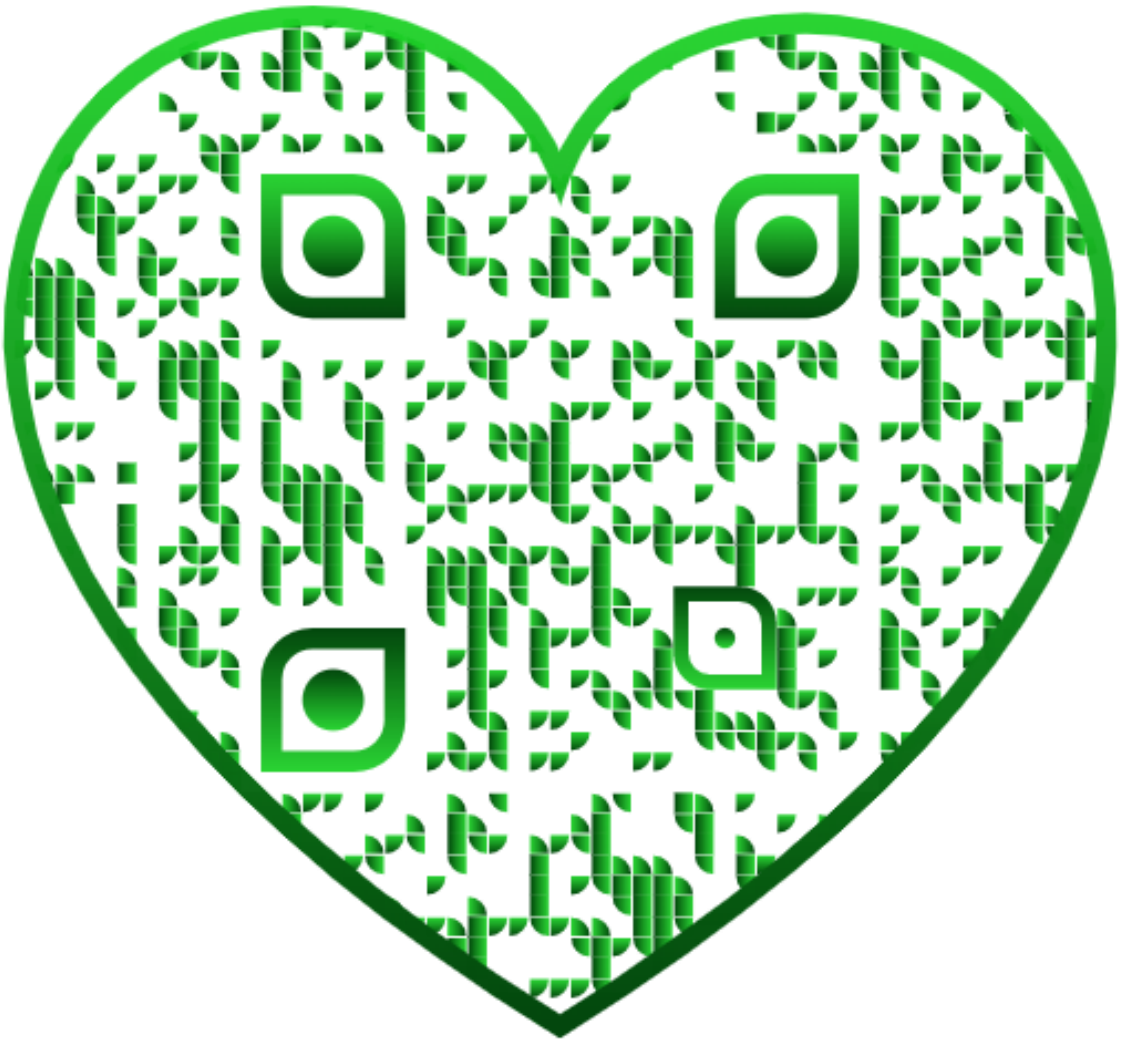

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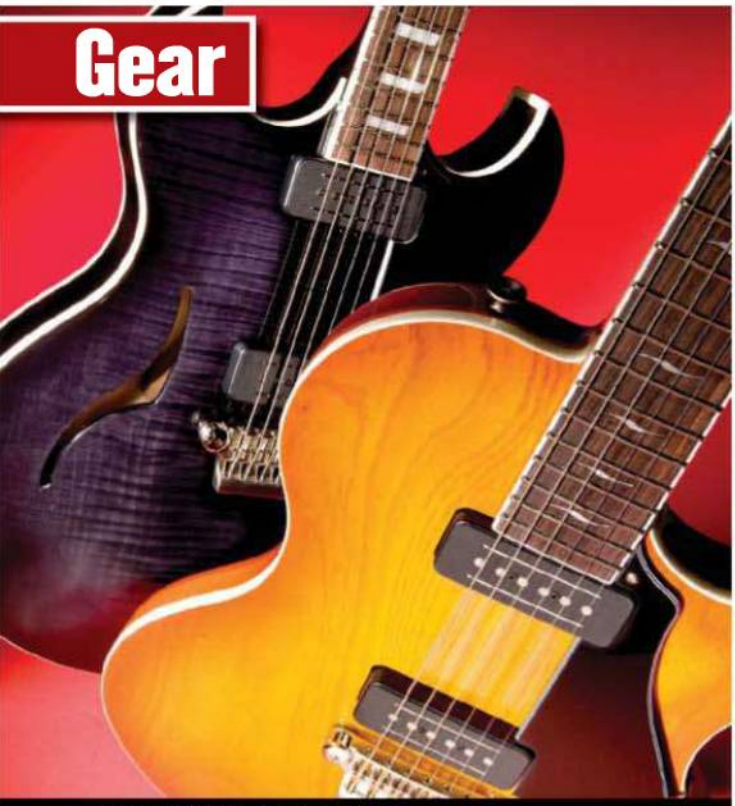

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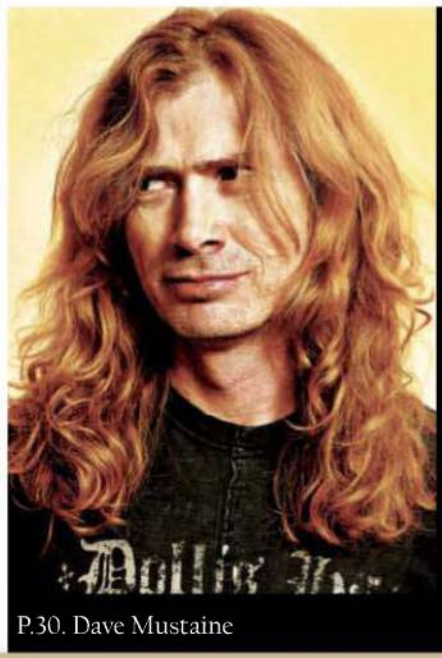

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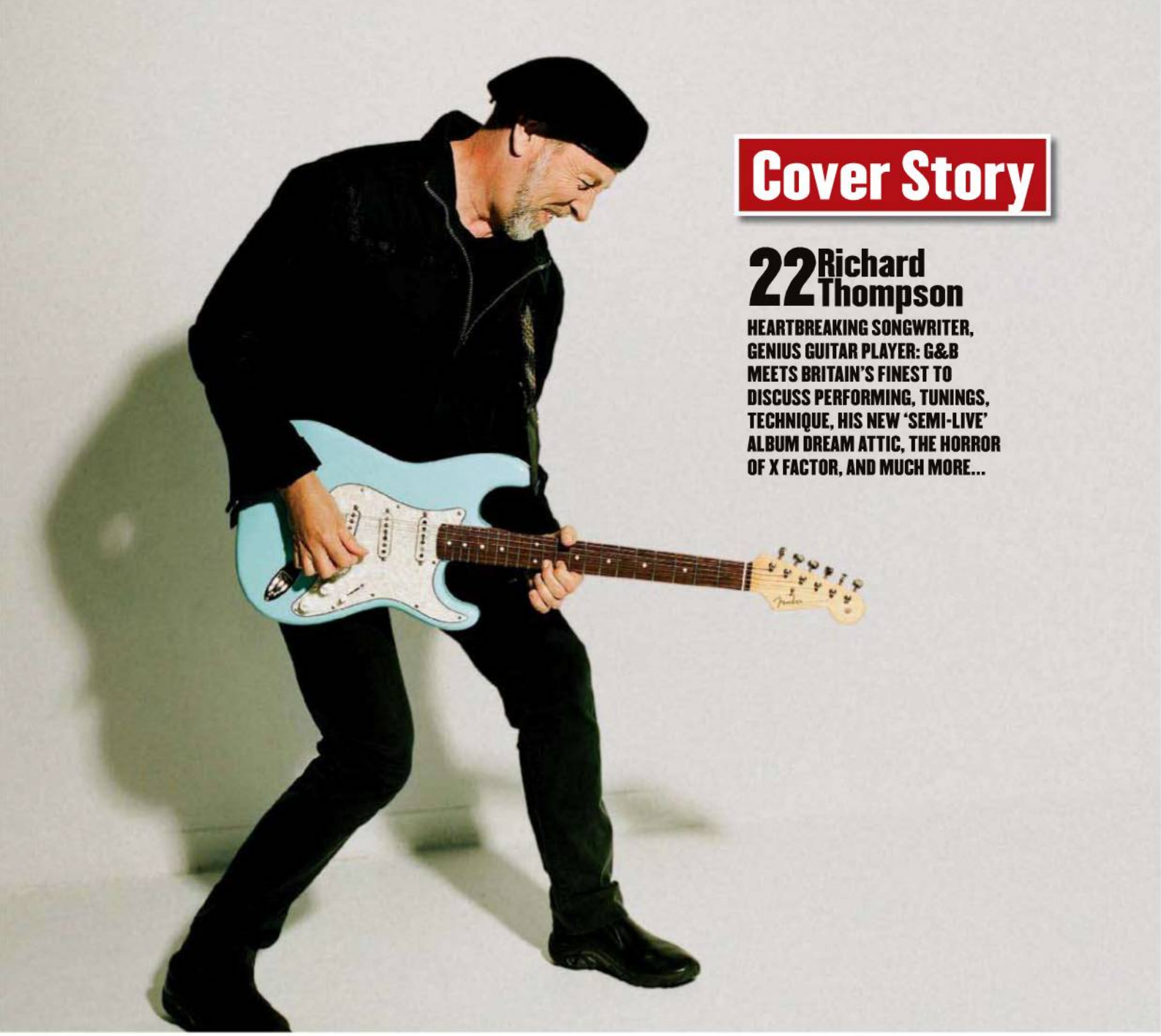

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Woke Up This Mornin' News

Fender Bonanza

Fender is unleashing a tourbus full of treats this month. They've taken the Strat, Tele, Jaguar and Jazzmaster and supercharged them with some new humbuckers to create the funky new Blacktop series. All are fitted with two vintage-style alnico humbuckers save for the Jazzmaster, which has two Seymour Duncan Designed pickups (a single coil at the neck and a humbucker at the bridge). They're looking slick, too, with alder bodies, maple necks, skirted black amp knobs, gloss urethane finishes, nickel/chrome hardware and a choice of rosewood or maple fretboards (rosewood only on Jaguar and Jazzmaster). Other additions include a vintage-style vibrato on the Strat, a reversed control plate and vintage-style hardtail bridge on the Tele, an Adjusto-Matic bridge with anchored tailpiece on the Jag, and a more streamlined three-way toggle switch that replaces the Jaguar's usual mind-boggling array of switches and controls. They're all £539.99 but for the sunburst Jazzmaster, which is £575.

The new upgraded Hot Rod III amps have improved circuitry and speakers and smarter looks with black control panels, new badges, 'dog bone' handles, chickenhead knobs and LED jewel lights. Lastly, the new Mustang amps offer lots of versatility and won't flex your finances unrecognisably out of shape. Equipped with onboard amp modelling (24 presets) and ample top-drawer effects, they also cut a fine dash with Fender's much-admired classic silver grille. More models can also be added thanks to USB connectivity. The 20W Mustang I is £108, the 40W Mustang II is £175. See www.fender.com for details.

Show Business

Marton Hotel & Country Club will play host to this year's Middlesbrough Guitar Show on Sunday 24 October. Expect a buzzing event with over 50 exhibitors, dealers, luthiers with new and secondhand wares. There's live music throughout the day from local folk/blues musician Martin Stephenson (ex-Daintees) and blues-rock trio the Mentulls, plus Gavin Coulson will be demoing Fret-King's latest offerings. Tickets are a steal at just a fiver and are available at www.guitarshows.co.uk or by calling the ticketline on 01925 813185.

Vai Takes On The Nation

Guitar Nation at London's Olympia brings with it the usual barrage of guitar goods... and gods! Once you've checked out the 120 manufacturers, distributors and retailers you can turn your attention to two musical torchbearers. Steve Vai is booked to perform *Attitude Song* live in the 450-seater auditorium, and knob-twiddler extraordinaire Youth will be showing off his mixing prowess. Vai will be re-creating some of his most iconic guitar tracks in a special masterclass and if you snap up an exclusive Vai VIP pass - £150 - you could be chosen to play alongside the great man and trade lick for lick. Dates are 13/14 Nov, tickets start at £10. See www.guitarnation2010.com.

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Secret Shoppa

VISITING A GUITAR SHOP NEAR YOU!

CRAIG'S MUSIC, BODMIN, CORNWALL

Nestling in the depths of Cornwall, Bodmin is proud of the fact it was the only Cornish town to be recorded in the Doomsday Book... oh, and it also has a very well-equipped guitar shop. If you want a full-blown guitar rig then Craig's Music can oblige, or if you want to build an electric guitar from scratch then they have all the parts and accessories. 'We've been here over 18 years and we've got a good reputation with local musicians – and the passing trade, as we're right on the holiday route,' offers owner Nigel Savage. 'We're also very active online, with three websites where the customer can see our video demos or even see and hear the guitar they're interested in. We also have a loyalty card, and we support the Cornwall Channel, where venues can check out band videos – it's like an online showcase.'

LAYOUT

Over the years Craig's Music has expanded both left and right of the original premises. It now features three roomy and well laid-out departments separately dedicated to guitars, amps and effects, acoustic guitars and PA gear

NEW GEAR

A fine range of quality guitars, basses and acoustics from PRS, Fender, Rickenbacker, Takamine, Guild, Jackson, Freshman, Hofner, Traben, Ovation, Ibanez, Washburn, Hamer, Crafter, Sheridan, BC Rich, Westfield, AXL, Ashton and Peavey plus amps and cabs from Fender, Marshall, Line 6, Laney, Orange and RMS

RANGE OF SECONDHAND GEAR

Part-exchange is welcome, and there's a cool selection of quality used equipment including amps and combos by Fender and Vox and affordable guitars by Jackson and Fender

BEST BARGAIN IN THE STORE

We spotted several in the higher bracket such as a PRS McCarty in McCarty Burst reduced to £1575, while a secondhand Marshall half stack comprising a JCM 2000 TSL60 Series head and a 1960 4x12" would walk out the door for £699

CONCLUSION

Craig's Music is very pro-active and crammed with all the essentials to keep trade rocking. A great shop right in the heart of Cornwall.

VITAL STATISTICS	
Layout	19/20
Staff knowledge	19/20
Staff helpfulness	19/20
Range of new gear	19/20
Range of secondhand gear	15/20
Parking: on site	
TOTAL	91%

CRAIG'S MUSIC
CONTACT: 01208 77744
2-3-4 Bell Yard, Bodmin, Cornwall PL31 2JL
WEB: www.craigsmusic.co.uk

In Brief

Big Four DVD

If you missed Metallica, Slayer, Megadeth and Anthrax sharing a bill at the recent Sonisphere concerts, fear not – you can now get your mitts on a DVD of their seminal performance in Sofia, Bulgaria. The DVD/Blue Ray includes full performances from all of the 'Big Four' on a two-disc set and features backstage footage and interviews with the thrash metal giants. The 'super deluxe' edition also includes a 24-page booklet, poster, photos and a Big Four plectrum!

Small Fortune

It's amazing what can be minaturised these days – so imagine our glee when Vox informed us they'd crammed Satriani's awesome sound into this tiny red box. The new Satriani amPlug is modelled on his custom rig. It takes distortion from the Satchurator and analogue-style delay, filter and EQ from the Time Machine. Kill the delay at the flick of a switch and plug in an mp3 player to jam along to your fave tunes. More at www.voxamps.com...

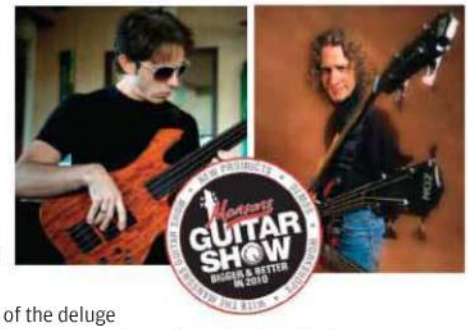
Get Your Mojo Back!

Mojo Guitar Fairs have announced three new events to take place this year; the East Lancs Guitar Fair at Haslingden Sports Centre, the South Cheshire Guitar Fair at Crewe Alexandra Football Ground, and the Yorkshire Guitar Fair at Thirsk Farmer's Auction Market. All the events cost £2.50 (U14s free with an adult). www.b-visible.co.uk/mojoguitars

Don't Fret

Ever imagined having a bass with both a solid fretted sound and the velvety tones of a fretless at your fingertips? Well, the pioneering bods over at Ibanez have done just that with the new Ashula six-string hybrid, combining both on one neck. Based on their flagship Soundgear bass, this cunning new innovation is perfect for those inclined towards the solo but who still need to hold the groove. Feedback from players led Ibanez to make the top D and G strings fretless, but they added maple fret lines for visibility. The Ashula has Sonic Arch pickups, a five-piece jatoba/bubinga neck, a light ash body and a rosewood fingerboard. We can hear those bass odysseys now. The price? £899. Details, of course, at www.ibanez.com.

Manson Show



The UK's biggest regional guitar show returns with a plethora of brands, demos and workshops. On top of the deluge of new gear including Marshall, Orange, Fender and Martin, there'll also be appearances from Joe Zon (Zon Zon basses) and four-string maestros Michael Manning and Alex Bershadsky to show you how it's done. The dates are 23 and 24 October, the venue the Riverside Leisure Centre, Exeter (first 250 bookings get a free set of Rotosound R9 or R10 strings). Entry: £8 (one day), £12 (two days). Contact sales@mansons.co.uk or call 01392 496379.

Lennon Acoustics

Gibson celebrates Lennon's would-have-been 70th with three handmade J-160E acoustics. First, a repro of Lennon's original in vintage sunburst (limited to 500); next, a Custom Shop 'Imagine' model in soft white finish (limited to 70); lastly the 'Museum', representing the Lennon-Oko Bed-In protests with thin natural finish and 'Yoko and John' sketches on the body (limited to 70). All feature Lennon's signature in abalone ('Imagine') or MOP, '60s-style laminated sitka spruce top, jumbo '60s frets, Lennon's birth-date engraved on the 12th fret in MOP, single P90 pickups and mahogany back and sides. More: www.gibson.com.

The Lost Chord

Stung by accusations of easy-peasiness, this month we offer you a real finger-stretcher, an F#11 as used by Mr Steven Siro Vai (a chap, coincidentally, with rather long fingers) in the chorus of *Rescue Me Or Bury Me*. You need to keep your fingers upright so that the open top two strings can ring out clearly.

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Guitar Nation 2010 preview

13-14 November, London Olympia

Stacked full of gear and with an eyebrow-raising line up of stars, Guitar Nation promises to be the guitar-lover's event of the year

There is but one major guitar show on the calendar this year and it promises to be a corker. With the likes of Music Live and the London Music Show taking sabbaticals there's a big gap in the market, and Guitar Nation is the event to fill it. There'll be 120 exhibitors from Marshall to PRS and Martin showing their wares, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. It'll also be a weekend of great gigs, masterclasses, demonstrations, seminars and cutting-edge debates for all guitarists and musicians serious about music. Two floors of London's massive Olympia Exhibition Centre will be packed with new, used and vintage equipment, leaving plenty of scope to buy, sell or trade your own gear – and they promise Antiques Roadshow-style guitar valuations, too.

The list of artists appearing is impressive. Steve Lukather, Bernie Marsden and Albert Lee are putting in a stint; top of the bill is Steve Vai, who'll be performing as well as hosting a masterclass. Phil Hilborne, Pino Palladino and Elliott Randall are well worth catching, too. Guy Pratt is one of the world's top session bass players, and his one-man show describing his experiences with Madonna, Pink Floyd and Roxy Music has also become legendary – and it's just one of many treats.

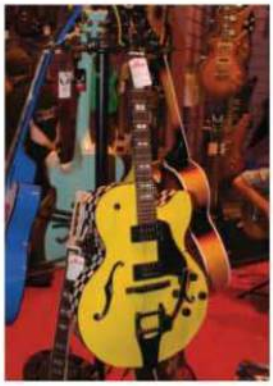
There'll be seminars from people like John Page – founder of the Fender Custom Shop – with other subjects taking in technique, concerts, recording, A&R and production. A £10 ticket will get you in to see the gear and £20 is all you'll need to pay to gain access to all the live shows, discussions and seminars bar the Steve Vai Masterclasses. See www.guitarnation2010.com for more info and to book tickets.

Bernie Marsden will play a Rory Gallagher tribute

Live: jazz ace Martin Taylor

Albert Lee will bring Hogan's Heroes along

Phil Hilborne



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Troy Sanders - AD200B, SP410

Bill Kelliher - THUNDERVERB 200, PPC412C

Brent Hinds - THUNDERVERB 50, PPC412C

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Woke Up This Mornin'...

Treasured Possessions

Photos: Mike Prior

The Falstaff has a full 25.5" scale length, ideal for dropped tunings

Handbuilt in Cumbria with the best materials, this is a serious acoustic guitar

Not all great acoustics are built in Pennsylvania, California or Texas... some of them come from a good deal closer to home

Will Kevans Is A Surprise Convert To The Fylde Falstaff

Will Kevans traded half his guitar collection to get his mitts on his '70s Fylde Falstaff – and he only went in the shop to try out a few Gibsons. As a singer-songwriter already with a gong from the prestigious International Songwriting Competition under his belt, Will turned many heads with his debut album *Everything You Do*, and he's convinced the guitar will aid him in turning out a few more. 'You only have to play one chord and people sit up and listen,' he beams. 'Your ears are immediately engaged in the sound.'

'I thought Fyldes were folk guitars made for bearded sandal-wearing real ale drinkers'

Before his conversion Will had favoured big-name American acoustics and had had little time for homegrown luthiers' work. 'I had this attitude that Fylde were English folk guitars made for bearded sandal-wearing real ale drinkers, but I put those misconceptions aside as soon as I picked it up and played it.'

The retailer was a friend, but Will still had to throw in a Gibson LG-0, an American Tele, a bitsa bass and a Baby Taylor plus £200 in cash to land the Fylde. 'It was a bargain,' Kevans insists. 'He could see how much I wanted it and took pity on me. Finding this kind of rich, warm tone across the whole of a guitar is a rare thing, and the bottom end is just beautiful. I'm primarily an acoustic player, so I just had to have it.'

It's a robust guitar, too – and it has to be, because Kevan's low tunings and hard-playing style demand thick strings and a tough finish. He virtually wore away the top on his old Baby Taylor. 'It's a bit of a macho challenge playing an acoustic guitar with very, very thick strings on it – like an ultimate finger workout,' he grins. Luckily he's a keen rock climber on the side, an activity he finds helps to strengthen the fingers. 'I sometimes even use heavy-gauge Dobro strings... they help give you the body and the sustain, but intricate picking up the neck works well too. The Fylde can handle just about anything.'

Kevans has always had a problem with his nails hitting the body of the guitar when he fingerpicks, but with the Fylde it's not an issue – and he's sure is down to clever design. 'I think the fretboard is much thicker and higher than on most guitars, and my fingers miss the guitar body altogether – they usually sound like a bunch of tap-dancing midgets. It's quite a substantial guitar all over. It's got a lot of wood in it and it's very powerful.'

The Falstaff's neck is quite thick – deep enough to have trouble accepting Will's favourite capos, so he's had to go back to his old adjustable Shubbs, but it's a small price to pay.

'Every time I play it I'm inspired to write new songs. I'm excited because I'm hoping to work with some serious players next year in America and it'll be great to have a nice instrument to show off. If my house was on fire and I could only grab one guitar, this is definitely the one.'

info

LATEST ALBUM: EVERYTHING YOU DO

Americana meets English folk in a smooth package with guests steel maestro Al Perkins and ex-Steely Dan man Elliot Randall

MORE INFO:

www.willkevans.com or www.fyldeguitars.com

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Woke Up This Mornin'...

Soundtrack Of My Life

Ben Mandelson

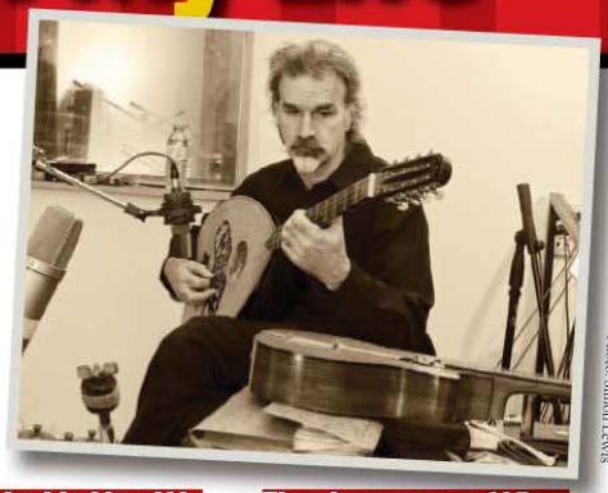
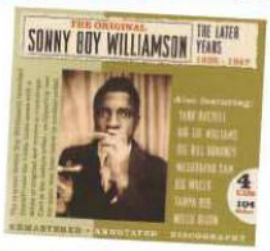


Photo: Simon Lewis

No matter what corner of the globe it's from, if it has strings Les Triaboliques man Ben has probably played one. He reveals the LPs that set him on an exotic path

From early punk to world music trailblazer, Mandelson is an intriguing figure. He cut his teeth with punk misfits Amazorblades before briefly joining Howard Devoto's art-rockers Magazine. When they split in 1982 he began performing a unique blend of styles from around the globe as 'Hijaz Mustapha', often with future Triaboliques bandmate Lu Edmonds in tow. A mysterious collective called 3 Mustaphas 3 was born, and they set about entertaining audiences by archly claiming to be an extended family from the Balkans while performing a surreal cocktail of breathtakingly diverse music. Ben has taken time out from his current day job as one of Billy Bragg's Blokes to join Edmunds and sometime Robert Plant sideman Justin Adams to plough a similar vein with Les Triaboliques, who will be touring in November. See www.myspace.com/lestriaboliques.

At 16 I'd listen to these songs 20 times a day...



The Original Sonny Boy Williamson

The Later Years 1939-1947

Sonny Boy often played with Big Joe Williams on guitar and Yank Rachell on blues mandolin. I'd drive my mother mad by learning all the harmonica parts then going back and trying to learn all the mandolin parts. I really wanted to be Yank Rachell. At 16 I bought a mandolin and it still goes everywhere with me – it's my most-travelled instrument.

This embedded itself in my teenage mind...

Django Reinhardt & Stephane Grappelli

The Quintet of the Hot Club Of France

He's still an idol, but in the last few years I've realised that Django wasn't one in a million – there were loads of great guitarists around him. You can hear his contemporaries – brothers, sons, nephews, neighbours – on an album called *Gypsy Jazz School*. It's fantastic to put his music in context.

The champagne of LPs – light & full of bubbles...

Samba Mapangala & Orchestra Virunga

Disco Time

Trust me, this is no disco record – it's *the* classic East African or Congolese album. It's kind of like a Stax record as opposed to a Motown one... everything is stripped down. It was key listening in my 20s and one of my big inspirations. I wanted to release it over here on my record label, GlobeStyle. That never happened, but it's still a touchstone.

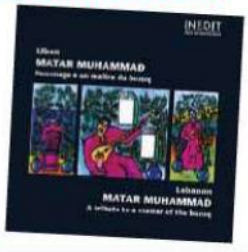
Hiotis was the Les Paul of the Greek bouzouki...

Manolis Hiotis

30 Years

This was the guy who revolutionised Greek music in the '50s – he popularised the electric bouzouki, and even added another pair of strings to it. Like T-Bone Walker he was a bit flash, and some people didn't like it. He had the same little moustache, too. I transferred this to tape and took it everywhere. There may have been better electric bouzouki players but he was the first.

Astonishing improvisation that still inspires...



Matar Mohammad

A Tribute To A Master Of The Buzuq

This was recorded live at the Beirut theatre in 1972, completely solo, and every time he gets to the top of a run the whole audience roars because it's just so marvellous. He played a buzuq, which is similar to a bouzouki. You could call it belly dancing music, but it's just so beautiful. The Triaboliques are proud to consider him to be a kind of god uncle.

Blistering solos in the middle of doo-wop tunes...

The 5 Royales

It's Hard But It's Fair

Steve Cropper named guitarist Lowman Pauling as his big inspiration. Pauling wrote *Dedicated To The One I Love* and *Think*, which was covered by James Brown. He came up with thoughtful lyrics and he played a Les Paul through a little amp which was fantastically distorted. It's wonderful to hear something with such drive and edge in the middle of a doo-wop song.

Play This Track From My DVD...

Les Triaboliques

rivermudtwilight

We do a curious version of *Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood* and it's a useful window into the band. You can hear all the different tonalities of what we do. The first part is an old traditional Romanian Jewish piece and there's a prog rock 7/8 twiddly bit in the middle.

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Pitch Invasion

Step away from this column, advises Adi Vines. It contains dangerous information that will lead you to Just Intonation, Equal Temperament and thence swiftly to the pit of hell. And we're all buggered anyway

A couple of months ago during a guitar-related rant in these pages I mentioned in passing that it is an impossibility for any guitar to play in tune, and I have since received a very worried email from a chap who is interested in hearing why this is. This issue is such a lengthy, complex minefield that I almost hesitate to go into it, and I must also warn you that once you are aware of the problem your life will be forever ruined as you cannot help but listen to everything with an over-critical ear. Furthermore, once you become a tuning Nazi, you will always be a tuning Nazi. So here is a much simplified summary. Read on - at your peril.

The acceptance of the 12 semitone octave as a standard (at least in Western music) dates back to the days when we were all warty peasants who had to scrape a living from the soil with our bare hands. The minstrels who were employed to entertain the people who lived in the castles had terrible difficulty playing in ensembles due to the various instruments of the time splitting the octave up into different intervals. Once the 12 semitone octave was agreed upon, something called Equal Temperament became the dominant method of deciding how much of the frequency range a semitone should take up (which is 100 cents each, as electronic tuner users will know).

This division of the octave has generally worked well but it has caused some problems for fretted instruments. Unlike a piano, which has one string per note, we have many notes per string, and the calculations for the placement of the frets were purely a mathematical compromise based on the vibrating length of the string and did not take into account the effect of finger-pressure around the nut area and the resistance of the fret itself (and to a lesser extent how hard the string is plucked). To complicate things further, the human ear does not hear increases in pitch in a linear manner. Some note equivalents, spread across octaves, are not perfect multiples of each other.

To avoid getting bogged down in some head spinning musical/mathematical theory that goes all the way back to the days of Pythagoras, it's easier to just say that the upshot of all this, in real terms, is that even if a guitar is properly set up and intonated it will not play exactly in tune in all keys on all parts of the fingerboard. It's as near as dammit, but when we say 'in tune' we are actually referring to an accepted degree of out-of-tuneness that all guitarists must suffer.

How bad the effect is varies from instrument to instrument, and some areas of the neck will be better than others. However, if you have ever carefully tuned using open strings or harmonics only to find that some chords still sound 'out', this will be the reason why. Some professionals use offsets, effectively tuning it 'out of tune' so it plays more 'in tune'. Pete Townshend reputedly tunes four cents flat, and Eric Johnson is said to use a combination that goes as far as 12 cents flat on the low E - but how effective these methods are will depend on each individual's personal style.

Tuning is a complex minefield, and the problem can ruin your life. Once you become a tuning Nazi, you will always be a tuning Nazi

This inherent out-of-tuneness is the nature of the instrument, unfortunately, and even though modifications such as compensated nuts and proprietary tuning systems exist that will improve the situation, the fact is you are still not going to be 100 per cent in tune. Ever. So get over it.

Adi Vines has worked with Radiohead, the Sex Pistols, the Darkness, Razorlight and more. See www.xselectronics.co.uk for more

Guitar & BASS MAGAZINE

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Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

Star Letter

HAD YOUR PHIL?

Shame on you, *Guitar & Bass* magazine! We have just left what would have been the 60th year on this planet of perhaps the UK's (if not the world's) most iconic and charismatic bass guitarist of all time: the late, great Mr Phillip Parris Lynott.

From what I've noticed (and I HAVE been looking) the landmark year came and went without any major feature in *Guitar & Bass* on an icon that can never ever be replaced or successfully copied!

Where were the 'What was Phil Lynott's gear' article or the 'Phil Lynott's basses: where are they now?' features that over four generations of bass players would have read with interest? I was particularly keen to see if *G&B* would endeavoured to track down the great man's various basses. I know where one is – I've played it and have the pictures to prove it... thanks, Philomena!!

While Phil's ability on the bass could be matched, perhaps, no one will ever come close to being able to match the all-round package this man delivered to us. Who could compete with the raw charisma, charm, style, swagger and sheer presence this icon of icons had in abundance? (Elvis perhaps, although even he would have been on the back foot as he wasn't a bass player). I mean, how many bass players get to have a statue in their homeland's capital city, for Christ's sake?

Left, Paul. Below, Phil. Or is it the other way around?

The way I look at it – *Guitar & Bass* has one last chance on the horizon to redeem itself and save face as a leading light in giving bass players what they want. In January 2011 (on the fourth, to be precise), it will be a full 25 years since the Black Rose went to join that great gig in the sky. If I was you I would start penning the article now (and when the time comes you can blag that you 'had this planned all along')! I for one will say nowt if you do! Well, what do you reckon?

One last thing: while I myself have now reached a half century, I would like to think that I can still throw the odd 'live and dangerous' shape when required, flashing my own mirror scratchplate (purchased and fitted in his memory in '79) in the process, See the picture enclosed for the evidence!

Paul Allan
via email

G&B: Given the fine way you've crafted this argument, we're a bit stymied as to how to reply (and a round of applause to you for that). We promise you that we didn't forget, and yes, we have something in progress – but then, as you point out, we would say that, wouldn't we? All we can do for now is print your fine testimonial to the man in an ongoing attempt to ensure Phil Lynott is never forgotten. Finally, fine bass you've got there, not to mention the shape throwing. You've got it down to a tee.

ARIA

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The Hofner Shorty: a lot of love out there

GET SHORTY

Kudos for the review of the Hofner Shorty travel guitar in your September 2010 issue: it made me want to play mine again! I purchased it at a time when I was living a more nomadic life, which implied repeated stays away from home (and from my beloved instruments), sometimes for two or three weeks on end.

I've always felt that this guitar suffered from a serious case of neck-dive, something which your review perhaps did not emphasise enough. This made the guitar unpractical to play (for me at least), even while standing up, until I found a remedy: I tied an acoustic guitar strap behind the nut and let the Shorty hang real low, metal-style.

The Shorty had its moment of glory in this unusual configuration during a Soundpainting event which took place last

MOVING UP A LEVEL

I'm a US reader shelling out 10 dollars because I'm a big fan of your magazine. I came across the whole copyist debate and decided to throw in my two cents from across the pond.

When I was a younger guitarist about 10 years ago or so (back when prices were considered cheaper) I decided to get into playing guitar and I had a few choices in gear, including Epiphones and Squiers. I gambled on a cheap Epiphone Les Paul that my old man coughed up about 150 dollars for. I bought the guitar knowing sooner or later I would give up playing or grow out of it into a better gear, and for most players it's the latter. I ended up getting a Gibson Les Paul Special (I was 15 and worked for a whole summer) for around the price of $750.

At first I thought it was outrageous that I'd bought a guitar for three times the price of the same model by Epiphone, but I realise that I paid for something that would also last longer. After three years the Epiphone started to fall by the wayside, and the workmanship quality – despite being an official LP knock-off – was bottom of the barrel.

I know most people say they could settle for some knock-off and live with it, and there's nothing wrong if it's built really well. But I had two guitars of the same model, and the Gibson is far superior (even after the pickup modding I'm into) because it puts up with the hard work. When someone like me (then 15 years old – now I'm 24) makes an effort to love such a guitar then, yes, I will pay slightly more for a guitar that's really worth the money.

After that I saved up for a LP Classic, which costs even more than the Special and the quality is top-notch. Anyhow, most working class musicians like myself are gonna end up doing the same thing – save up and move up to a better guitar.

Charlie Sem
via email

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GUITAR GYM

QUADRICEPS STRETCH

This exercise feels fantastic, and it's great for stretching the low back extensors that are often tight – particularly in those people with an increased arch in their low back. Simply sit on a chair or bed, with your feet on the floor and your legs apart. Lean forward between your legs, and just hang there. You should feel the stretch in the low back. If you feel you need more of a stretch, just grab onto your feet or ankles and pull yourself further down. The further apart you have your legs, the more room you'll have to bend forward. Hold this position for around a minute, and repeat twice. Do this stretch several times a day... and enjoy.

Got a health issue that affects your playing? Marion Turner is a physio specialising in musicians' injuries. Write to us, and we'll get her on to it

year as part of the Borealis Festival in Bergen in Norway. During the concert the conductor encouraged me to take a guitar solo, which I did using a clean, twangy sound. I ended up slapping the strings in what I like to call an 'Albert Collins way'. The Shorty always delivered. I use it now for slide, and play it mostly lap-style (because of that pesky neck-dive) with an extension nut.

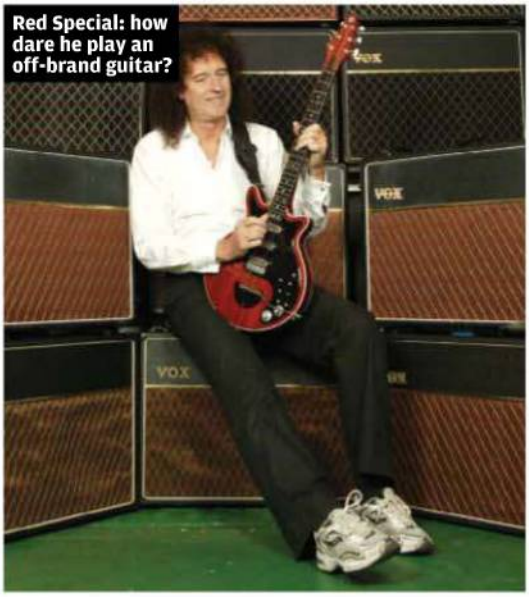
After reading your article, I re-strung it and tuned it to DADDAD, a modal tuning, which gave me renewed inspiration... and gave the Shorty a brand new voice!

S Robin
via email

TOUGH ON SNOBBERY, TOUGH ON THE CAUSES OF SNOBBERY

I've been reading your magazine now for years and have often read letters sent into you that have cheesed me off. However, I never thought to send back a reply before. But after reading Pete Griffin's letter in the November issue about Ben Greener's guitar collection and how 'crap' he thought they were, I feel I have to stick the boot in for Ben.

Like many of your other readers, I buy the other monthly magazines on guitars as well and I read so much stupid up-your-own-arse snobbery written by readers in all the letters pages that you'd think we were all playing things that can save lives, for goodness' sake. It's just a lump of wood with some wires dangling across it. And before anyone thinks I don't know what I'm on about, I've been playing a long time too, Mr Griffin! Thirty-five years, 15 of them as a pro... and I own 15 instruments of varying makes, ages and value, so I would also like to think I know what I'm on about. It's almost like 'how dare you' own any guitars that weren't handbuilt by Tibetan monks, or having the audacity to play something that doesn't cost the same as a brand new car! I don't remember ever reading such snobbery from any 'rock star' interviewed in yours or any other magazine.



Red Special: how dare he play an off-brand guitar?

One last point for Mr Griffin to mull over. Two of the most influential guitar players ever – Brian May and Eddie Van Halen – came to everybody's attention playing guitars that cost sod all to make and were held together with sticky tape, nails and bolts off an engine. Phew! That's better. Love the mag, by the way.

Mark Cottey
via email

If you can't always find a copy of this magazine, help is at hand! Complete this form and hand in at your local store and they'll arrange for a copy of each issue to be reserved for you. Some stores may even be able to arrange for it to be delivered to your home. Just ask!

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EDITOR'S LETTER

When I was starting out I'd find it strange to hear others talk about how they 'couldn't get on with a guitar' even when they thought the guitar in question was a good one. How difficult could they possibly be?

As I tried more guitars out, I started to realise what they were on about. I'll never forget the time I first had a go on a Firebird and a Flying V (the latter was with a group of mates who laughed long and loud at my cack-handed attempt to play the thing). Now I can talk about my preferences as regards to neck profile, balance and so on, and happily listen to others list their likes and dislikes. However, there's still this nagging feeling in my mind that you shouldn't get too precious about these things, so I've made a point over the past while of playing as many knackered guitars as I come across. It makes you think about your technique, and makes you realise how much work a great guitar can do for you (or even make you lazy). As a result, I've come to appreciate all guitars even more. Enjoy the issue...

John Callaghan
EDITOR
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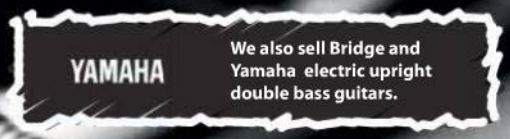
7761	Orange OBC810 Cab (8x10)
4658	Orange OBC115 Cab (1x15)
4657	Orange OBC410H Cab (4x10)
6637	Marshall MBC115 Cab (1x15)
6638	Marshall MBC410 Cab (4x10)
2753	Marshall VBC810 Cab (8x10)
652	Marshall VBC412 Cab (4x12)
6639	Marshall MBC810 Cab (8x10)
7267	Mark Bass Classic 152 Cab (2x15)
4819	Mark Bass STD106HF Cab (6x10)
7140	Mark Bass STD152HR Cab (2x15)
4816	Mark Bass STD104HF Cab (4x10)
7142	Mark Bass STD104HR Cab (4x10)
4818	Mark Bass STD102HF Cab (2x10)
7265	Mark Bass NY804 Cab (4x8)
7141	Mark Bass STD151HR Cab (1x15)
8647	Mark Bass New York 804 Cab (4x8)
7266	Mark Bass NY121 Cab (1x12)
6607	Mark Bass Traveler Series
7432	Line6 LowDown 410 Cab (4x10)
6585	Gallien Kruger 410BLX Cab (4x10)
6608	Ashdown NEO 2104H Compact Cab (2x10)
3615	Ashdown ABM210T Evo3 Cab (2x12)
3620	Ashdown ABM410T Cab (4x10)
3619	Ashdown ABM115 Cab (1x15)
8577	Ashdown LB212 Cab (2x12)
6599	Ashdown ABM810 Cab (8x10)
4737	Ashdown Mag 810 Deep Cab (8x10)
3632	Ashdown MAG410T Deep Cab (4x10)
3630	Ashdown MAG115 Deep Cab (1x15)
8032	Ashdown USA 115 Large Cab (1x15)
8124	Ashdown LB 212 Cab (2x12)
5118	Ashdown NEO 115H Comp Cab (1x15)
8033	Ashdown USA 410H Cab (4x10)
8034	Ashdown USA 414H Cab (4x10)
8035	Ashdown USA 610 Cab (6x10)
8036	Ashdown USA 810 Cab (8x10)
5117	Ashdown Klystron NEO 210 Cab (2x10)

Electric Upright Double Basses

8043	NS Design NXT 4 String
5250	NS Design CR4 4 String Bass
5251	NS Design WAV Series 4 String



Bass Effects

4524	Tascam CDBT2 (Bass Phrase Trainer)
6777	Tascam MPBT1
3326	Roland VBASS Bass Processor
5671	Line6 Bass Floor POD
5672	Line6 Bass PODxt Live
4323	Electro Harmonix Bassballs USA
8478	Digitech BP80 Bass Mulit-Effects
4374	Boss ME50B Bass Multi-Effects
3193	Boss GT6B Bass Multi Effects
5797	Boss GEB7 Bass EQ
6939	Boss GK3B Synth Driver Pickup For Bass
6556	Boss GT10B Bass Mulit-Effects
5284	Boss CEB3 Bass Chorus Pedal
5282	Boss LMB3 Bass Limiter Enhancer
5794	Boss ODB3 Bass Overdrive
5804	Ashdown DRIVE (Overdrive Plus)
5807	Ashdown Envelope Filter
5806	Ashdown Chorus Plus

Woke Up This Mornin'...

Stop Look & Listen

Albums
Books
DVDs

The Orb vs. David Gilmour

Metallic Spheres

(Columbia)

It doesn't take Einstein to figure out that putting two masters of the soundscape together was always likely to bear fruit - and this is no ordinary fruit. *Metallic Spheres* is a blissed-out odyssey, with Gilmour's instantly recognisable phrasing spilling from his Strat via many a sumptuous Orb-ism. Split into two parts, each one made up of five 'movements', this collaboration explores all things ambient - with legendary producer Youth providing bass and keys to boot. Captivating stuff.

Santana

Guitar Heaven

(Sony)

Santana lines up a host of great vocalists to execute his versions of rock classics. It's a pleasingly varied mix. Led Zep's *Whole Lotta Love* kicks off proceedings with Chris Cornell slamming Plant's searing melody, India Arie's soothing tones accompany Santana's joyful flutters in *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, and Nas provides a fervent delivery over wah-drenched guitar on *Back In Black*. Faultless.

Joe Satriani

Black Swans And Wormhole Wizards

(Epic)

By now we all know what to expect from Satch, and *Black Swans* sees our hero delving even deeper into his talents. Wave after wave of effects crash over signature riffs and false harmonics until we're once again happily surfing with the alien. *Light Years Away* is a good centrepoint, all crunching riffs and sonic majesty, and if it's possible to fly even further into the stratosphere then with the closer *God Is Crying* he does just that. Measured, rhythmic and monumental.

Kenny Wayne Shepherd

Live! In Chicago

(Roadrunner)

KWS lets rip in the Windy City with some truly incredible blues guitar. Of course with a man of his stature it's to be expected, but pair his limitless talent with the likes of Hubert Sumlin and Willie 'Big Eyes' Smith from the Legendary Blues Band and the project surpasses itself. A long-awaited live album that's as pure as they come.

Neil Young

Le Noise

(Reprise)

Young teamed up with the musician/producer Daniel Lanois for *Le Noise* and it's turned out to be a truly favourable partnership. Grimy guitars meld with looping soundbites, off-the-wall effects and Young's brittle tenor to make this one of his most assured releases to date. With vocals right up front and the fuzz always in lazy support, *Le Noise* is an absolute must for fans and a winner for first timers.

Snap Judgements

Freebass

It's A Beautiful Life

(Hacienda)

Three of Manchester's iconic bassists (Hooky, Mani and Rourke) blend their traits, and Gary Briggs provides the voice. The results: interesting but not truly inspiring.

Ian Siegal

The Dust

(Nugene)

Gravelly tones and moving anecdotes dance around Siegal's blues/country licks, creating a wonderful world in which only he could dwell. Low-slung and rootsy.

Steve Lukather

All's Well That Ends Well

(Mascot)

Engaging rhythms that evoke Steely Dan mix with slick licks on Lukather's latest offering. Lyrics are a shade on the trite side, but otherwise a pretty worthy collection.

Bill Frisell

Beautiful Dreamers

(SLG)

More slanted greatness from the unique mind of Bill Frisell. This skips and jaunts through 16 indefinable, inventive and vivid cuts leaving us happily disturbed.

Weezer

Hurley

(Epitaph)

The grandfathers of geek rock return on bristling form with *Hurley*, their latest fuzz-driven statement. Kooky lyrics and hooky singalongs galore. Great stuff.

Alterbridge

AB III

(Roadrunner)

Myles Kennedy (Slash's touring singer) drives *AB III* with scorching vocals, while the band grind, riff and squeal their way through 14 emotionally fraught rock songs.

DVDs

Rush

2112 & Moving Pictures

(Eagle Vision)

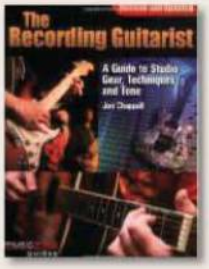
Taking us from the formation of the band through their troubles with the press and differences with their label to finally striking gold, this DVD is recommended viewing. Various interviews, live clips and studio footage provide a welcome peek into the inner workings of the group, tracking their rise from a cult band who steadfastly refused to change their ideas to the fully-fledged superband they quickly became. As rock as they come yet also as prog as they come, the Rush story is as fascinating as their multi-faceted legacy.

Books

The Recording Guitarist

Jon Chappell

(Hal Leonard)



This updated edition begins from scratch and slowly builds to explaining how to lay the foundations of the perfect demo. Containing useful tips and tricks for mic'ing amps, computer-based recording, mixing and everything inbetween, this is perfect for beginners and an excellent refresher for those in need of that little bit extra. There's a great chapter on the set-ups of the stars and even advice on how best to package your masterpieces. All in all this is a concise, straightforward aid to achieving the best results for recording your six-string magnum opus.

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Woke Up This Mornin'...

Competition

To take a guitar or not to take a guitar? That dilemma, intrepid globe-trotters, will be banished forever by this month's bijou yet very playable competition prize

Win!

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We know our readers well. They're international jet-setters, often called in at the last minute to deputise for musicians in stadium-cramming megabands who have had the misfortune to slip in bathrooms and bruise their delicate wrists. They snooze smugly and horizontally at 36,000 feet and sip ludicrously-priced champagne in worryingly secluded hotels. And what they need is an electric travel guitar like this very nifty Traveler Speedster, cunningly designed to provide fretboard duties where space and weight are at a premium. It's small, it rocks, and this example of compact lutherie can be yours for £9.63, or whatever a second-class stamp costs these days. Check these features:

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For a chance to win this Traveler Speedster, append your name (the real one – not the one to check in with to fool the paparazzi) and add your details to the form below and send it to *Have Speedster Will Travel* at the usual address. The editor's decision is final. And could you sort us out a triple-A pass with aftershow and a plus-one on the door? Ta!

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: Competition is open to readers aged 18 and over, except employees of IPC Media and other companies associated with this competition. All prizes must be accepted as offered. No other prize alternative is available, such as cash in lieu. No purchase is necessary to enter the competition and entries including all the same information as the coupon will be accepted on a post card or photocopy for instance. The winner will be selected and contacted by Guitar & Bass Magazine after the deadline date. Prize is one Traveler Speedster guitar. Guitar and IPC would like to contact you by post or telephone to promote and ask your opinion on our magazines and services. Please write 'No Guitar & Bass magazine' on your postcard if you prefer not to hear from us. IPC may occasionally pass your details to carefully selected organisations so they can contact you by telephone or post with regards to promoting and researching their products and services. Please write 'No other companies' on your postcard if you prefer not to be contacted). Only one postal entry per stamped envelope. The promotion is only open to UK residents. The closing date for entries is 8 November 2010. Proof of postage is not accepted as proof of delivery. The prizewinner's details can be obtained after the closing date by sending an SAE to Guitar & Bass Competition Query, IPC Media, Leon House, 233 High Street, Croydon CR9 1HZ. No correspondence will be entered into and the judges' decision is final. Entry implies that you accept these terms and conditions.

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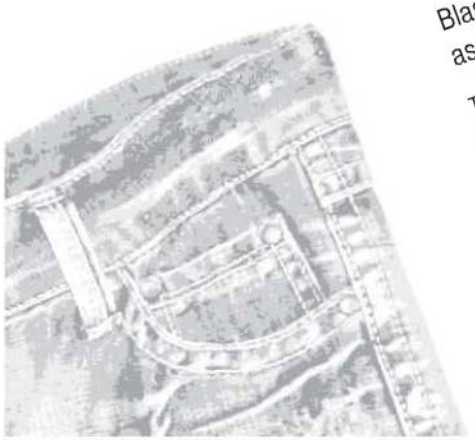

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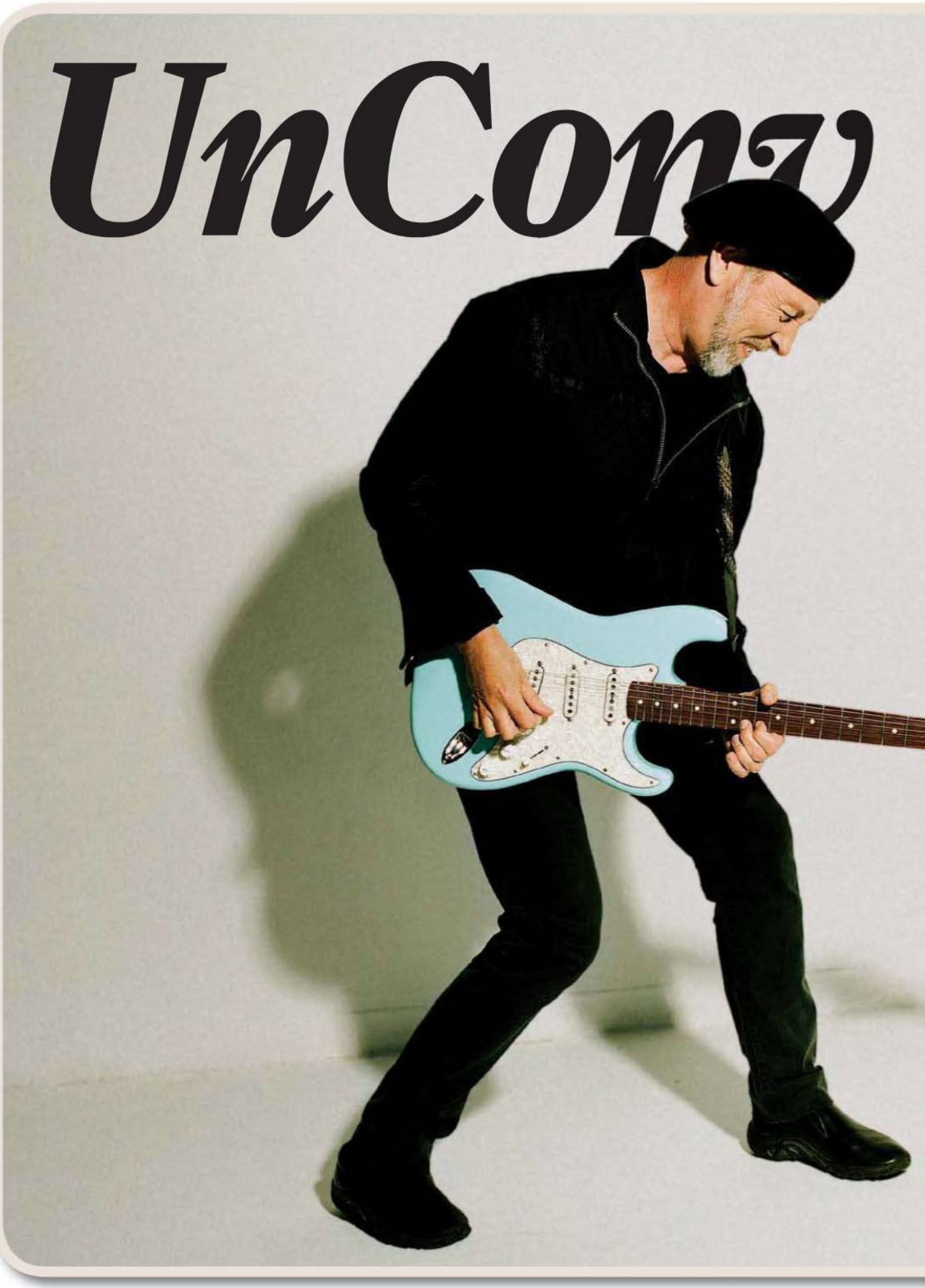

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entional

Richard Thompson never stands still. A new album, Dream Attic, captures the singer, songwriter and guitarist where he's at his very best – in front of an audience. Interview by Pete Langman

'It's a gleeful, sadistic, serial killer-type dance tune - every album should have one,' jokes Richard Thompson. He's talking of *Sidney Wells*, one of the tracks from his latest offering, *Dream Attic*. Well, we think he's joking. Thompson is a man of many dualities, simultaneously looking back to traditional music as he tries to move the tradition onwards, treading the Janus-like path he set out on during his days in Fairport Convention, the band he helped found as a precociously gifted teenager. In 1968, singer Sandy Denny joined Fairport, and a new direction was forged as they decided to blend traditional with contemporary, unleashing folk rock on an unsuspecting public with the release of *Liege And Leaf* in 1968. 'It was a pivotal point. I'm really still there, it's still what I'm doing,' judges Thompson. 'It was a kind of lifetime decision.'

'I don't think of myself as a virtuoso, a Joe Satriani. If I have any merits it's as someone who accompanies a singer'

While Thompson gives the impression that the pioneering fusion of *Liege And Leaf* has defined his path ever since, this does his versatility a disservice. Ignore his Ivor Novello, the BBC lifetime achievement and Mojo Honours List Les Paul awards, and the fact that *Rolling Stone* placed him amongst the top 20 all-time guitarists, and you're left with collaborations with the likes of Fred Frith, film scores for projects such as Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man*, the curating of London's Meltdown Festival, countless LPs and, of course, that *Playboy* project.

Richard Thompson in *Playboy*? Indeed. The magazine asked a number of influential musicians to contribute their own 'songs of the millennium' list and Thompson took the request seriously, producing a list which ran from the 11th century *Sumer Is Icumin In* through to Britney Spears' *Oops, I Did It Again* (which he also performed as a medieval tune 'from Brittany' called *Marry, Ageyn Hic Hev Donne Yt*). *Playboy* only really meant songs from the previous century, so left Thompson out. His response? Record the songs and take the show on the road.

The resulting show, *1000 Years Of Popular Music*, showcased his virtuosity, versatility, and immense musical learnedness. 'The audience and the performers all know it's going to be disparate, that every song is not going to sound like every other song,' he tells *G&B*. 'It's an insane project, really - you have to change gears for every song. It's a hard ➔

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Fairport Convention, the quiet revolutionaries: Dave Mattacks, Dave Pegg, Simon Nicol, Richard Thompson, Dave Swarbrick

Credit: Jim McCrary/Getty

show to perform and I'm not sure anyone else would find it any more comfortable, it wouldn't matter which discipline you came from: if you were classically trained that wouldn't help you, if you played early music that wouldn't help you after 1700.'

The project seems a natural offshoot for a musician so concerned with the connection between past and present. 'You have to know your musical history to know that you're not repeating something,' he's keen to point out. 'If your musical roots are shallow, if you go back 20 years musically, the chances are that you're going to be recycling ideas that really aren't that profound. If you know where your heroes got their ideas from, go back a couple of generations, you learn so much more.'

An exemplary guitar technician as well as singer, songwriter and performer, Thompson trained in classical fingerstyle when young, and developed his 'pick and fingers' technique unconsciously. 'At some point I was too lazy to put the pick down, or something,' he explains. 'I was watching TV and playing and not thinking about it, and it just became a style.

'You can play certain patterns on the bass string you can't play with a thumbpick or with your thumb, but with a pick you can pick up and down, and at the same time play a melody with your fingers. It's a style of convenience.'

For all his facility, he is insistently modest: 'I don't think of myself as a Joe Satriani. I should be so lucky! I don't think of myself as an instrumental virtuoso, I see myself as an accompanist, and if I have any merits as a guitar player then it's as somebody who accompanies a singer.'

The singer Thompson generally accompanies is himself, of course, and he's keenly aware that his personality as a guitar player is merely one part of the show. 'As a performer I try to bring my various skills into the arena, as songwriter, singer, guitar player – I try to use those skills to make it a better experience for people coming to hear the music.

'Offstage you can see those as separate units, and songwriting as a separate thing, but I'm usually writing with an end in mind, and that's the performance package. In most songs I'm using the guitar as an accompaniment, and if I'm playing a solo I'm trying to continue the narrative of the song.'

This accentuation of the musical self as a performer, this subjugation of technique to the needs of the song, has been one of the driving forces behind *Dream Attic*. Many RT fans love certain live versions over the studio ones; in response, this is not so much a live album as an album recorded live. 'I started thinking that maybe we could chop out the studio process and record an album of new songs in front of an audience,' he muses.

The first 10,000 units include, as a bonus disc, the demos Thompson recorded to send to the band. The differences between the two discs are instructive, and show how the recording and rehearsal processes affect the final versions of the songs. 'There are different versions here or there, different lyrics, things have different shapes,' Thompson expands. 'That's just because when you get into the rehearsal process things change, new ideas occur to you, and you think perhaps you'll add a verse here, perhaps we'll cut that there.'

A tune like *Crime Scene*, he admits, is a tricky song. 'Structurally and

'With Fairport we had to build a bridge between traditional and contemporary music because that bridge had been burned, especially in English music'

Credit: Gems/Getty

RT bought his '59 Strat in London in 1971. The neck was later replaced with a '55

Richard Thompson on.....

On Autotune and Talent Contests

Thompson is very much a musician in this regard. 'Some of the records we grew up listening to are out of tune or out of time – but they're classics, and if you sweeten them up too much, they're going to lose something, there's a certain edge that's going to be missing.' Its use on *The X Factor* is far simpler. 'It's a talent show, right? Then it's about talent. Tuning vocals gives people more talent than they have. It's cheating, a misrepresentation to the audience. Those shows are disgusting, anyway. It's a deeply conservative, unimaginative, non-innovative approach to televising music.'

On Old Schoolmates

'Hugh Cornwell of the Stranglers and I were friends at school. He wanted to learn bass, so he bought a homemade one – horrific, really bad, just ghastly. I helped teach him some things. He picked it up pretty quickly and we had a band from about the age of 13 to about 16, when I started to play with the people who became Fairport. I saw Hugh about three months ago in Los Angeles. His band played and I got up and we did a song that we'd last played in about 1965, the Nashville Teens' version of *Tobacco Road*, which was bizarre.'

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Thompson's Style In Just Three Songs

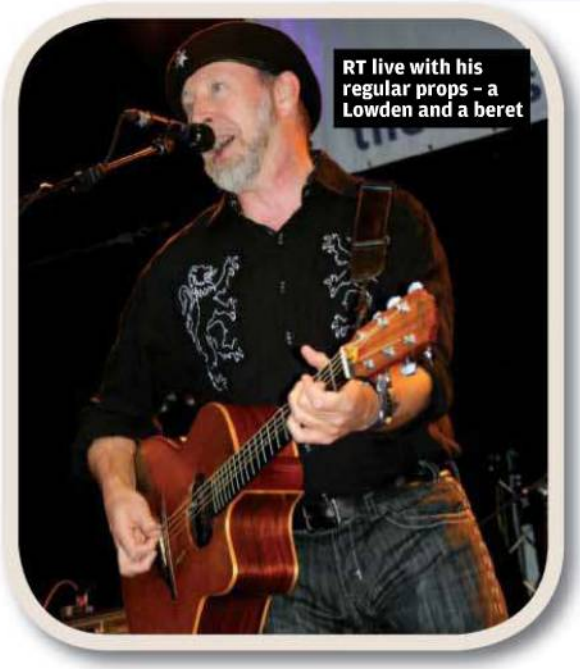
The Choice Wife (First Light, 1978):
A version of an Irish pipe tune, this shows some of RT's melodic side

Turning of the Tide (Amnesia, 1988):
An real pick'n'fingers showcase

Hard on me (Mock Tudor, 1999; semi-Detached Mock Tudor, 2002):
Thompson says he hates all his solos, though when pushed he'll admit that this one is 'quite good.' The longer live version is 'also, I think, quite good.' Steady!

Sofa so good: Thompson at home with mid/late '60s Strat and Ferrington. Luxury

Credit: Mike Prior



RT live with his regular props – a Lowden and a beret

thematically it's difficult. On the demo it's more succinct; when it gets in front of an audience with a band, it gets longer, more dramatic. There's a huge dynamic range in that song, and solos become longer, more expressive, more intense. The studio is an artificial place to make music. Music should always be in front of an audience.'

With his shoebox-sized home studio it's perhaps no wonder that Thompson considers the studio process 'rather monastic', so this album was recorded live over eight nights, with the final three shows taking place in the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco. It was produced without overdubs. 'We were prepared to cheat and say, well, if we have to redo the vocals we'll redo the vocals, but it just didn't happen. All the guitar solos and everything are as played. We might have fixed one bass note.'

A smaller room, a small audience and close-mic'ing the band helped Thompson and co-producer Simon Tassano achieve a sound 'somewhere between a studio and a live recording.' Certainly, there's an energy and intensity that complements the album's excellent sound quality.

For Thompson, it's a question of balance. 'With Fairport it was still necessary to build a bridge between traditional music and contemporary music because the bridge had really been burnt, especially in English music. Today we're able to play in that crack. We have two melodic instruments, a fiddle and Pete Zorn playing the flute or the sopranino sax, so you have a section there that can play tradition-based melodies.'

> ***'The studio is an artificial place to make music. Music should always be in front of an audience'***

When it comes to guitars, Thompson keeps the same balance. 'What you want from any instrument is stability,' he notes wisely. 'There have been advances in neck design, end pin block design, neck joints are better than they used to be, and the acoustics that I play are remarkably stable considering the pounding they get on the road, so I'm very happy about that.'

He even enjoys a more stable relationship with his hurdy gurdy, an instrument which illustrates his attitude to music quite neatly. 'Every note you play on a hurdy gurdy is significant, whereas I think on the guitar you can glide by some notes and it's not that important. It's more whereabouts you end a phrase or begin a phrase, but on the hurdy gurdy every note really means something.'

Thompson's main quest when it comes to a guitar is good tone. Never a fan of humbuckers, preferring a 'thinner and slightly more hollow sound', his early Fairport-era goldtop Les Paul was fitted with P90s, a pickup he still uses. On realising that the players he liked to listen to were mostly Fender users, however, he soon changed over. Apart from his '59 Strat, his three-pickup Kellycaster Tele and a '57 reissue Strat made for him by his guitar tech Bobby Eichorn, Thompson has several Danny Ferrington guitars, including a baritone acoustic. LA-based neighbour Ferrington built his blue Ferringtoncaster partially as a test bed for different pickups. 'We threw in an assortment and at some point we liked the ones that were in there. I think it's a P-90, an alnico Strat in the middle and a Broadcaster bridge pickup, and that seems to work pretty well. It's a straight-wired guitar, there's no tone control, and each pickup has a volume, so you can blend the pickups in a kind of infinite way by varying the volume on each pickup.'

This blending, this balance, seems to affect many aspects of Thompson's approach. Explaining his solos in Fairport, he notes that 'I'd be trying to glide into it, not to make it a big statement at the beginning, but to creep into it as a sort of continuation of the vocal narrative.'

Thompson was converted to Lowden acoustics when a dealer brought one backstage in Washington DC. 'It was

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Thompson's Meltdown guitar guests included Martin Simpson, James Burton, John Etheridge, The Ventures' Nokie Edwards and Motown's Dennis Coffey

Three Tunes That Made An Impact

Django Reinhardt: Running Wild

'As a kid from the age of two I listened to my dad's Django records. Pretty scary. This solo is terrifying. It could put you off guitar playing right there.'

Les Paul: How High The Moon

'It's pre-rock'n'roll rock'n'roll in about 1950. That's pretty extraordinary.'

The Shadows: Apache

'From an early age I wanted to play *Apache*. I found a like-minded friend and then another, and we had a little instrumental band when we were 11 or 12 years old.'

a really fantastic guitar, with amazing sustain and great evenness of tone.' Thompson went to his shop the next day and tried out 30. He hasn't looked back, and now has his own signature model, the original of which is currently used by his son, Teddy.

'Amplifying an acoustic is an endless quest,' he ponders. 'You're doing something artificial, taking something that's acoustic and trying to make it louder, so it's all cheating.' Thompson uses two pickups on his Lowdens - a Sunrise magnetic ('tons of gain, you can really crank it up a long way,') and an Countryman Isomax condenser mic for added 'air'. 'You need two systems. One doesn't really give you enough choices,' he adds. 'It's always going to be a compromise.' The mic and pickup are blended through a Ridge Farm Gas Cooker valve preamp, modded to survive the rigours of the road. 'It's a great preamp, and it matches both the condenser and magnetic pickup very well.'

'If your roots are shallow, if you only go back 20 years, you'll just recycle ideas that aren't all that profound'

Listen to his deft vocal and guitar stylisations and it's obvious that Thompson places himself at the tune's disposal, switching musical styles as the need arises. He takes a similar attitude to tunings. 'I do a lot of stuff just in dropped C. I use DADGAD, I use C modal, which is CG... hang on, CGDGBA, sorry... CG, crikey; CGBGBE.' It's okay for us to forget our own tunings. We're in great company.

How does he pick a tuning? 'I'm looking for something that sounds full in a certain key. Sometimes you start writing a song and you have to fit it to your vocal range, and sometimes you start in the wrong key, so you have to find a better one, and sometimes in doing that you have to go into a tuning to make it sound better, make it sound fuller.

'Another interesting way of writing a song is to invent a tuning right there, something you've never tried before, and see what happens as you try to find chords in this new tuning - it can take you melodically to places you wouldn't normally go. Then you can rationalise it into a more accessible tuning. It can be good not to know where your fingers are going to go.'

Thompson sees the past through the eyes of his present. He may live Stateside but he feels that this has made him an even more jealous guardian of his own culture and heritage. 'Even though I live in America I don't absorb American culture. I watch it from a distance, and it's pretty frightening.'

He is, he suggests, a 'zealous exile'; exposed to traditional Scottish dance music by his father - 'a Scotsman who lived in London and fiercely celebrated Burns night, he was more of a Scotsman than someone living in Scotland' - Thompson read Scottish ballads he found in the family home and learnt folk songs at school. 'It didn't seem as exciting as the Kinks or Muddy Waters, and it wasn't until Fairport made a decision to go back to those roots that we really started to feel the importance of that music.'

Thompson's advice to a youngster starting out? 'It's an overcrowded profession, and rock'n'roll has been around for 50 years. The longer it goes on, the fewer new ideas there'll be. To stand out these days musicians have to make a virtue of their individuality. That's what you have to emphasise - instead of trying to blend with everybody else, be different.' This, he explains, is what Fairport Convention did all those years ago. 'Mind you, in 1967 audiences were either stoned or confused or just plain generous, and they would accept a whole range of different music styles.

'I'm not sure you find that openness any more', he laments. And this, mark you, from a man whose new album opens with the line 'I love kittens...'

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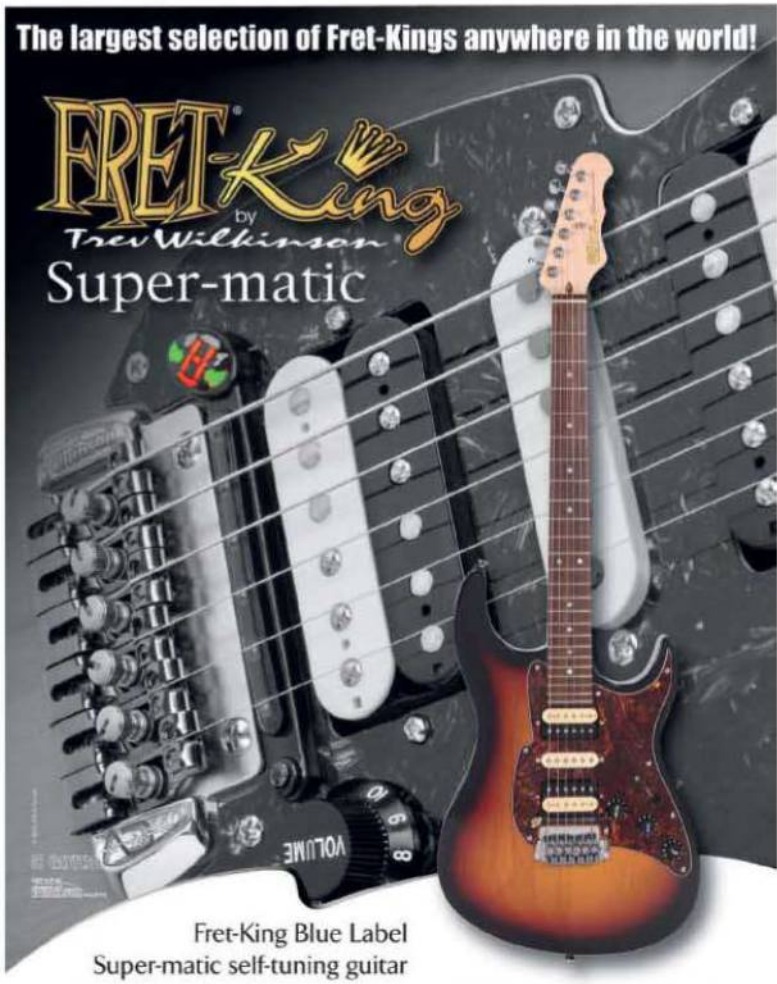

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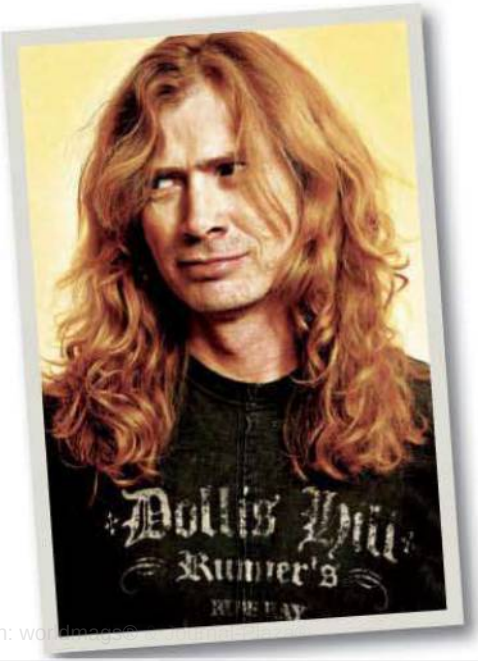
Last Writes

Dave Mustaine talks about his new book, major labels finally getting their comeuppance and taking Megadeth into the future with his new right hand man. Interview by Rik Flynn

Take the mix of dysfunctional childhood, booze, drugs, rehab and near-death, and you have the dog-eared tale of many a rock star. Add some weird religious happenings and the small matter of two of the greatest metal bands the world has seen, and you have Dave Mustaine. And if the best art is born of great suffering, then on the strength of his new memoir, *Mustaine - A Life In Metal*, it stands to reason that Megadeth's entire back catalogue should be deemed high art without further ado.

Of course, much of this suffering was self-inflicted, but this is a rock star we're talking about, not a Trappist monk... and even they would tell you (if they could) that their hardship wasn't forced upon them: it comes with the territory.

Here's the abridged version. Mustaine is born into a troubled household with an alcoholic father. After his parents' divorce, life becomes a transient existence with his mother and sisters on the run from this 'shadowy figure'. Lodging with an aunt, a devout Jehovah's Witness, Mustaine is forced into the faith. He turns to music and with something barely resembling an audition, gets the gig with Metallica. They begin their manifesto of 'harder, faster, and louder'. Demo *No Life 'Til Leather* burns down the grapevine with the help of four tracks 'primarily' penned by our man (that appear on Metallica's *Kill 'Em All*). Metallica fire Mustaine for excessive debauchery. Mustaine becomes obsessed with becoming harder, faster, louder... and *bigger* than Metallica. Megadeth is formed for that purpose. Metallica go massive. Megadeth go massive. Mustaine cultivates a huge drink and drug habit. A radial nerve injury in his hand almost destroys his career. Mustaine turns to God (and his god-*father*, Alice Cooper), quits drugs, and sorts his life out. As you can surmise, his book is a riveting read.



Hetfield and Mustaine in formation, Los Angeles, 1982

'If you put the time in on guitar that I did, then you'd probably be as good as I am. You gotta tell people that'

Bearing in mind all of the above, asking about *that* band was perhaps an unwise choice for an icebreaker. So are the hatchets buried, we ask, hesitantly. 'Obviously,' comes the blunt, unabridged answer. Great, that's that one sorted.

As one of The Big Four, Megadeth - with Metallica, Slayer and Anthrax - gathered their might to create some of the heaviest music known to man and rid the world of hair metal (if you're not a fan, at least give them that). Pleasing millions of fans and proving the name-calling is a distant memory, they recently played together with the rest of the Big Four on tour. All in all, we have a large amount of respect for the man talking to us right now.

So, in between writing 2009's *Endgame* (*Billboard* Top 10) and a crazy touring schedule, how did he find time to lay out his life story? 'It was finished last

Catalogue

METALLICA
NO LIFE TIL LEATHER DEMO (1982)

All of the songs on this underground demo later featured on Metallica's debut *Kill 'Em All*. Mustaine helped write four cuts

MEGADETH
PEACE SELLS... BUT WHO'S BUYING? (1986)

Considered one of the greats, *Peace Sells...* was Megadeth's first major label LP. Political and damn heavy, it brought the band in line with the big guns

MEGADETH
ENDGAME (2009)

A return to form, *Endgame* features the talents of new guitarist, Chris Broderick. Opening song *Headcrusher* was nominated for a Grammy

Gear

Guitars: Dean 'Zero', Dean 'Angel Of Death' V

Amps: Marshall, Marshall Megastack (warm up/rehearsal)

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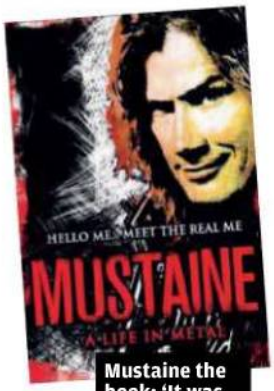
Out of control: Metallica in 1983

year,' says Mustaine. 'The stuff that has transpired since then, my God! We can't take a day off right now to save our lives!'

A perusal of the Megadeth website reveals a band - or brand - that has adapted to survive the doom surrounding the music industry and that are still doing very well, thanks. 'This is the greatest time in my career,' says Mustaine. 'To have record labels not be able to benefit from it... it's ironic. I think the record industry is getting what it deserved for fucking bands over for so long.'

One year shy of 50, Mustaine is still determined to remain close to his fans, communicating with them directly via the website and Megadeth Radio. 'We've been able to turn lemons into lemonade with the way we send material to our fans and keep them updated,' he beams. The fans have been queuing around many a block to pick up a copy of Dave's new book, too. How did he prepare to write it? 'I read up on some other bands, politicians, military guys...' remembers Mustaine. 'I even read Richard Branson's!'



Mustaine the book: 'It was very cathartic'

Dave Mustaine: 'I think the record industry is getting what it deserved'

'It was very cathartic; it was almost like getting rid of old wounds and being able to set myself free from the past'

What Do You Mean I Don't Believe In God?

Now a fully-fledged Christian, Mustaine lives within the strange juxtaposition of metal and religion (he refused to play with Rotting Christ). His own choice of band name, a 'unit of measurement equal to the death of 1m people by nuclear explosion' seems like a less-than-godly moniker... has religion changed Megadeth at all?

'It hasn't affected the way I write 'cos I've used the Bible to write lyrics since I started,' says Mustaine. 'The first line in *Peace Sells* says *What do you mean I don't believe in God/Talk to him everyday*. My faith and my writing has never been a problem for me... *The Conjuring* has a hex in it so I don't sing that song anymore!'

Religion has helped Mustaine to stay on the straight and narrow, and he even took a pastor on tour. 'I wanted to be faithful to my family and keep a lid on the partying,' states Mustaine. 'I wanted to do my job and not leave the fans wanting, but also not compromise my integrity. It wasn't so much that I didn't trust myself; it's just that I knew myself.'

As far away from Virgin's head honcho as Mustaine may seem, he is clearly an extremely ambitious, no one-will-stop-me kind of guy; the Branson of metal, if you like. And it's a story equally worth telling. With the constant shadow of Metallica hanging over him, the drugs, the alcohol, the injury... was it strange revisiting those times?

'The underlying goal was "just be honest",' recalls Mustaine. 'It was very cathartic; it was almost like getting rid of a bunch of old wounds and being able to set myself free from the past by shining the light on it. There was a lot of stuff that happened that was my fault, that I did either willingly or unbeknownst to myself, so it's really good to be able to work through that stuff.'

So is it really the truth, the whole truth and nothing but? 'The book's changed over the years because of how litigious everybody is,' notes Mustaine. 'We've had to change the names of some people in there, but it doesn't change who the people are. I could tell you "this guy in this band paid for me to go to a whorehouse in Brazil, and that guy did mounds of coke with me, and even though he had a family member die from it, he's still doing it." That would shake some people up! You know what I mean? So it's not a dirt dish, it's not how to be in two of the biggest bands in the world... it's who Dave is... me!'

Mustaine's pretty down to earth, even though he's featured in numerable Top 10 guitar countdowns and had the guts to re-learn the instrument from scratch after his injury. 'If you put the time in on guitar that I did then you'd probably be as good as I am,' notes Mustaine. 'You gotta tell people that. If Tiger Woods doesn't tell people the fact that he's good is because he spent his whole fucking life on a golf course...'

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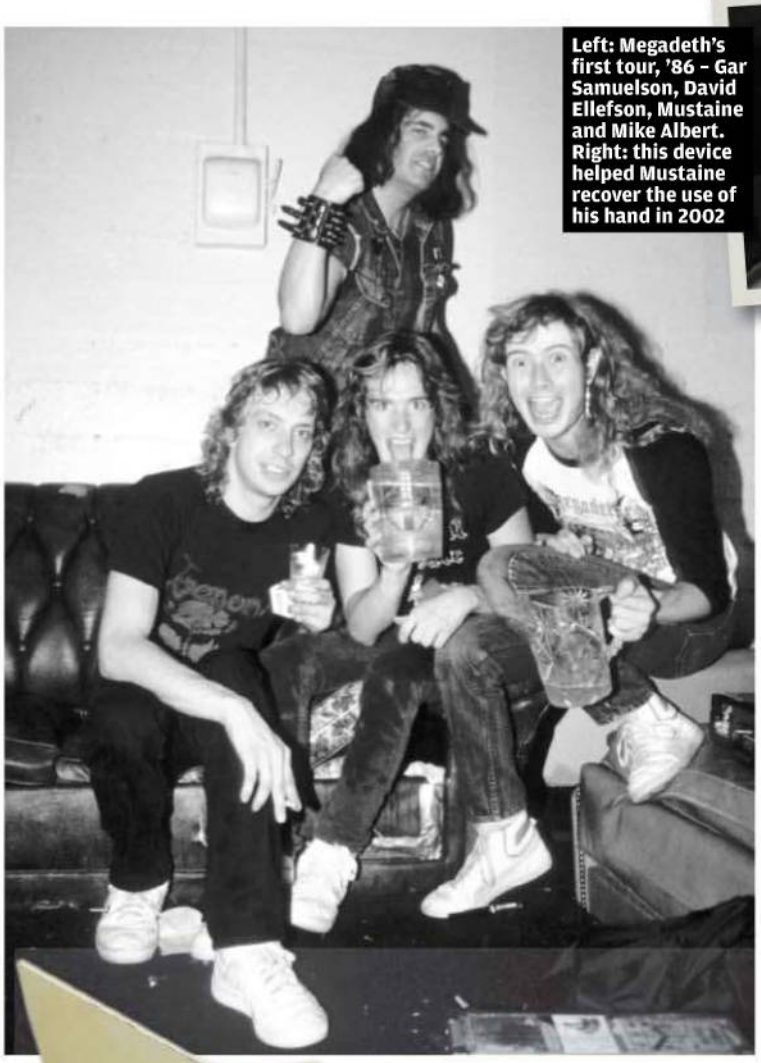
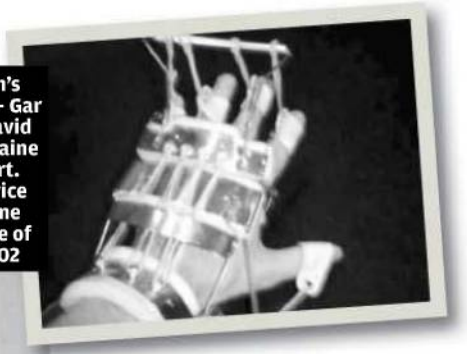


Left: Megadeth's first tour, '86 – Gar Samuelson, David Ellefson, Mustaine and Mike Albert. Right: this device helped Mustaine recover the use of his hand in 2002



Mustaine holds aloft his Dean signature 'Angel Of Death' V

Mustaine's Dean signature Zero: 'It plays just like a V'

> *'Playing with Chris is pretty much like when Ozzy had gotten Randy Rhoads'*

While quick to remain humble about his own skills, Mustaine is the complete opposite when it comes to his bandmates. How has playing with new guitarist Chris Broderick changed Megadeth? 'He's just such a monster on guitar,' says Mustaine. 'It's pretty much like when Ozzy had gotten Randy Rhoads.

'He's so good, he just inspires me to play better. Now when we get to the shows I go into the rehearsal room and warm up, play old songs from other people and try to learn little pieces of other music... I never used to do that. I've just taken such an interest in my instrument again. It's breathed a lot of new life into the band.'

Endgame is all the better for it. 'What Chris added was remarkable. A lot of the parts he came up with brought things into a much more melodic light. He's a graduate from music college, whereas I have to kinda say, "Okay, does this rub?" I used to listen to really weird players like Fripp and Holdsworth; there's only so much of that I can listen to because I need some melody in the background.'

Mustaine has worked his way through musicians like a chain-smoker demolishing Marlboros, including some of the best players metal has ever seen (Marty Friedman, anyone?). 'I think it's just one of those things,' he ponders. 'When you have four people that don't have the same vision, it's like a car with four tyres going in different directions.'

Despite this record of hiring and firing, he seems content with the current line-up, complete with original bassist Dave Ellefson, who at one time tried to sue him for royalties. 'Shawn [Megadeth drummer] kind of set that up,' recalls Mustaine. 'He contacted Dave and told me to get him back for the *Rust In Peace* tour. He really belongs in Megadeth.'

To get the job done, Mustaine uses Dean guitars and collaborated with them for his Zero model. 'We sharpened up the angles and I really love the shape,' says Mustaine. 'It's the only guitar I've ever had that's not a V, but it plays like one.' How do the Deans compare to his previous Jacksons and ESPs? 'Dean first, Jackson second, then ESP,' says Mustaine without hesitation. Recently at NAMM, he also conveyed his love of Marshall. 'I think it's the best amp for heavy metal in general. If you try some of the others, it's kind of like a heavy metal sound, but it really isn't. There's a lot of imitators around but there's only one Marshall.'

He's got the ultimate metal amp, the ultimate metal guitar and a fully stocked arsenal of determination. Read the book and you'll see that, truth be told, there's not an ounce of animosity left in Dave Mustaine (aside from his disdain for labels); he's a thoughtful, honest, funny man. He's been through more than most – including Metallica – and come out a worthy bastion of the metal world.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Slayer guitarist Kerry King was indeed briefly a Megadeth member
- Mustaine got into heavy metal by swapping marijuana for records
- Megadeth fans are called Droogies after the gang in A Clockwork Orange
- The bassline for Megadeth's Peace Sells... was used for the MTV News

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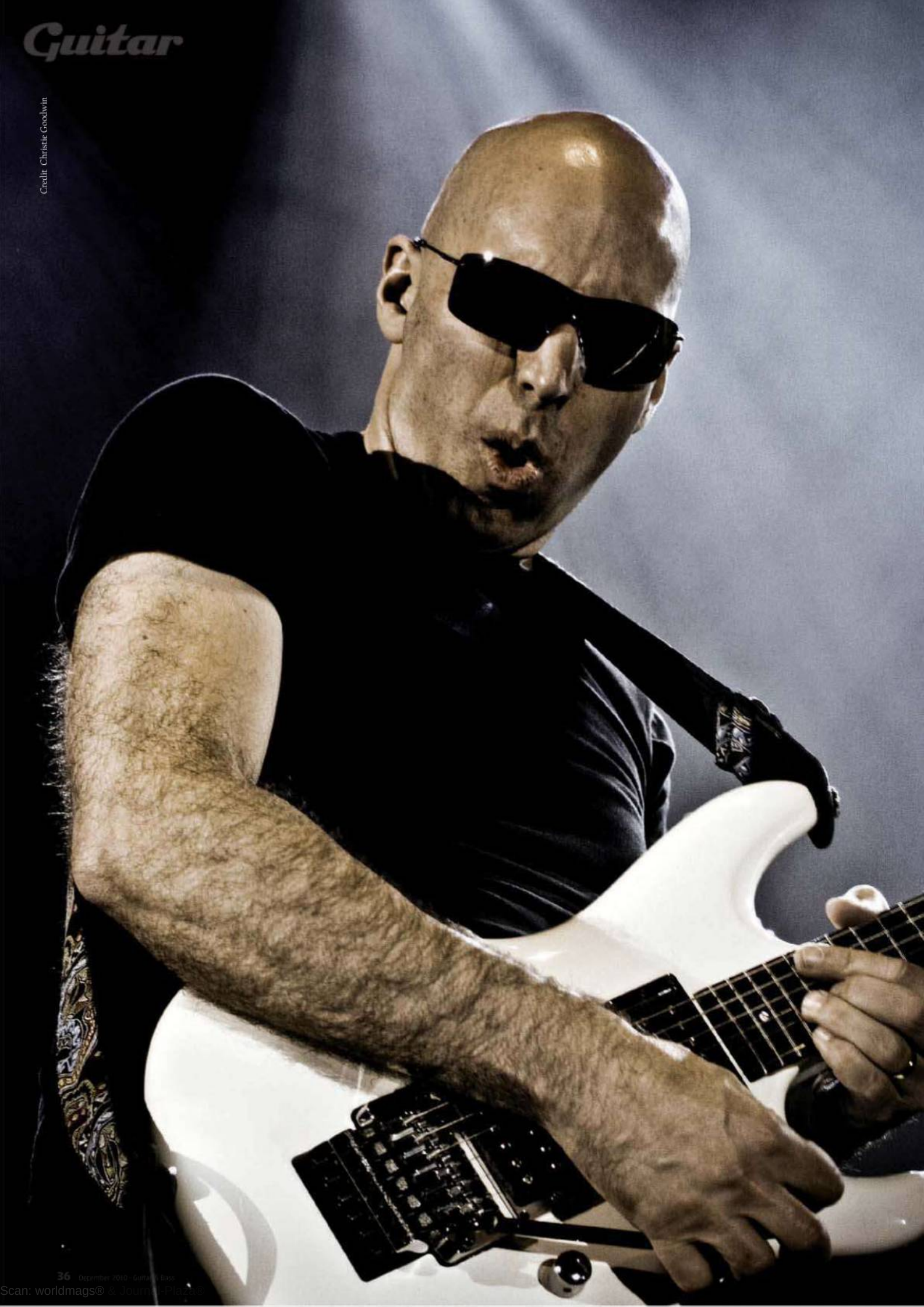

Credit Christie Goodwin

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Flying in a Blues Dream

With supergroup duties on the back-burner, intrepid guitar explorer Joe Satriani is back with new technology and a highly unusual method of selecting track order. Interview by Michael Heatley

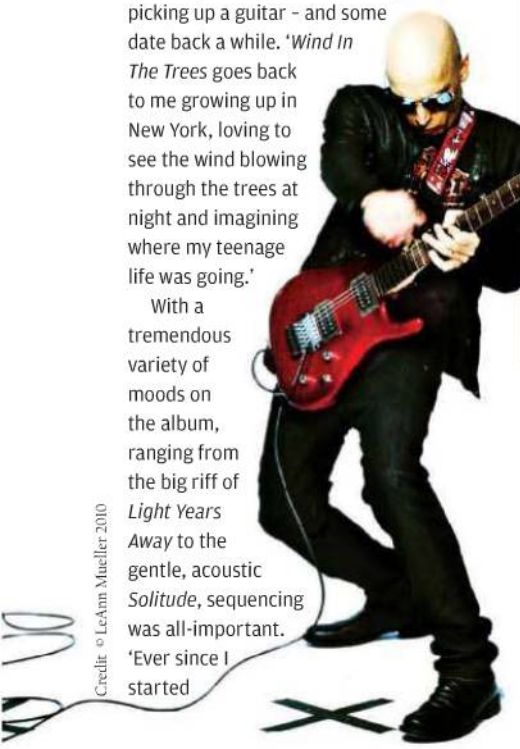
So Satch is back - as if he'd ever been away. Whether touring with supergroup Chickenfoot, paying live homage to Hendrix on an all-star US tour in the spring or launching a new pedal, the Vox Ice9, Joe Satriani is hard to ignore in the guitar world. In between such 'chores' he's put together a new album, the extravagantly named *Black Swans And Wormhole Wizards*.

'The title is in two parts,' he explains. 'The black swan is a phrase the ancient Greeks used to describe something that probably wouldn't happen. Once it did show up then it would change everything. I didn't want just *Black Swans* because it doesn't embrace the spirit of the album. So I started looking at some of the other song titles I had, and thought *Wormhole Wizards* was a great antithesis...'

As a composer of instrumentals, Joe comes up with a title and concept before picking up a guitar - and some date back a while. '*Wind In The Trees* goes back to me growing up in New York, loving to see the wind blowing through the trees at night and imagining where my teenage life was going.'

With a tremendous variety of moods on the album, ranging from the big riff of *Light Years Away* to the gentle, acoustic *Solitude*, sequencing was all-important. 'Ever since I started making records it's always been a problem for me... I get too emotional. My wife Rubina and I were in Vancouver for two weeks while [co-producer] Mike Fraser was mixing, and about halfway through he needed a sequence. I was sitting there at the hotel driving myself crazy until I realised that, although my wife had heard this music all too often in the last couple of months, she didn't know any of the titles. So I wrote them on cards, gave them to her and said "Sequence the record by the titles." Within about 15 seconds she had put it together based on how she thought they related to each other. I looked at it and thought, "That's brilliant!"'

Solitude started life as the prelude to a song called *Heartbeats* which Joe has yet to successfully record. Having just lost



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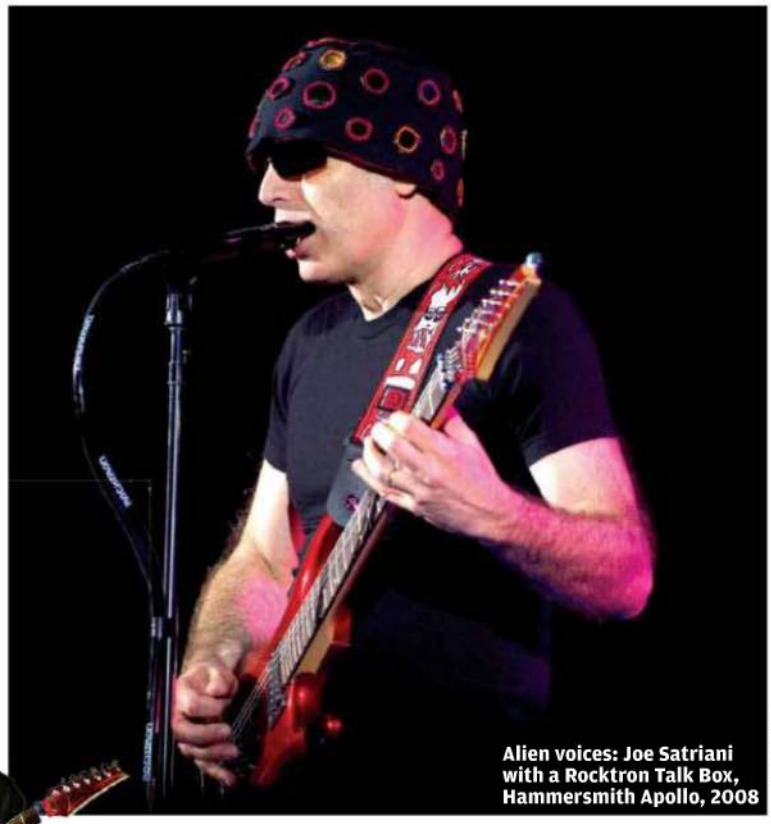

Alien voices: Joe Satriani with a Rocktron Talk Box, Hammersmith Apollo, 2008

Credit Mike Prior

'You'd think our first European tour would be a glamorous three months, but in 1988 only four places would have us!'

Catalogue

JOE SATRIANI
SURFING WITH THE ALIEN (1987)

One of the first instrumental rock albums to appear in the US Top 40, this early release put Satch on the map with a vengeance

JOE SATRIANI
JOE SATRIANI (1995)

Produced by Glyn Johns, this mid-'90s effort showcases a more laid-back, bluesier sound with less use of effects than previous recordings

JOE SATRIANI
BLACK SWANS & WORMHOLE WIZARDS (2010)

The latest, wackily-titled chapter in the Satch story showcases his multi-faceted style to perfection. Seriously

Gear

Guitars: Ibanez JS2100 and JS2400 electrics, JSA signature acoustic

Amps: modified Marshall JVM410

Effects: Big Bad Wah, Satchurator, Time Machine and Ice9 - 'my indispensable group of Vox pedals'

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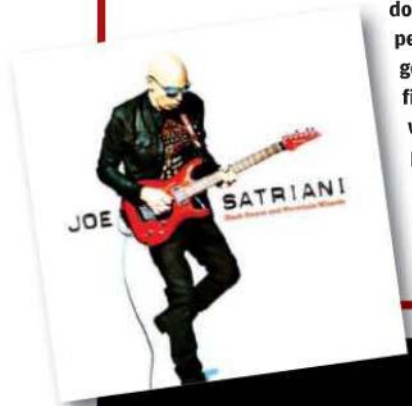
Best of British

Joe's European fans will be first to hear his new album live, reflecting a relationship that began in 1988. 'It's funny – our first European tour was four performances... and that was it! *Surfing With The Alien* was blowing up everywhere and you'd have thought we'd have a glamorous three-month tour, but actually only four places would have us!

'One of the London shows had about six or seven people; the other at the Marquee was heaving, exactly what you'd hope for. It made me think "I'm definitely gonna come back here; I love these people." It was my first time in Europe as a solo artist. The audience there just grooved and were out of control for so many years. It really is a place we call a second home.'

Joe has worked with a few Brits in his time, from Mick Jagger to Deep Purple, but the musician who's influenced and impressed him most is Queen's Brian May. 'He's come onstage at G3 gigs almost as much as Neal Schon has here in the States without being an official participant,' Joe smiles. 'Brian is an amazing musician and a great guy. Like Jagger, he's got pure stage magnetism; the audience is glued to his every move and every note. It's an amazing thing to witness. I've never had a chance to meet Jimmy Page. I kind of met Eric Clapton, but I'm not sure he met me! I've hung out with Jeff Beck a few times. I'd consider all these guys master players – they're the ones I grew up learning from.

'The English guys who have had the most influence over me have been Andy and Glyn Johns. As producers and engineers they're giants in rock'n'roll history. They created the sound that we assume is rock'n'roll, and how they manage people in the studio, how they get records done, how they elicit performances... it's a golden talent you don't find anywhere else in the world. How that family produced two outstanding producer/engineers is quite outstanding. It's something I think about quite often.'



Credit: Christie Goodwin

Credit: Mike Prior

Backstage at Hammersmith Apollo in 2008 with his red *Surfing With The Alien* Ibanez

his mother, the piece, 'reflecting both my parents and their personalities', ended up standing alone. 'It made sense to put it in front of *Littleworth Lane*, which is a song about my mother's house. I was shocked when Rubina did the sequence like that; it was if she knew how it was going to play. It was one of those funny moments of synchronicity.'

Littleworth Lane has a Roy Buchanan vibe that recalls *Bingo!*, the Steve Miller album Joe recently guested on – but Joe is reticent about his playing in the genre. 'I hate using the phrase "into the blues"!' he protests. 'It's more honest to say that, ever since I was a kid, I've loved blues and tried to play it and I've worked on trying to find my voice. About 10 or 15 years ago – around the time I was playing with Deep Purple – I thought to myself, I'm going to play at least an hour of blues every day; I'm going to put on albums that I think are great and I'm going to just sit there and do it. I knew I wasn't going to be whipping out the blues professionally, but slowly those professional moments came.

> *'I hate the phrase "into the blues". Ever since I was a kid I've loved blues and tried to play it'*

'Suddenly we were playing some blues with [his power guitar trio] G3. Then a friendship started up with Steve Miller; I started playing with him a few times at private functions and his shows, and I started winding up in situations where I was allowed to play blues. I put out a blues-based record with the *Joe Satriani* album in '95, but I still feel I'm just getting started in terms of how I would like my blues to sound.

'*Littleworth Lane* is more of a gospel kind of thing, but it was important that I didn't try to sound like the best blues player with the best blues tone.

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Credit: John Ewing/Corbis

Satriani, Michael Anthony and Sammy Hagar in New York with Chickenfoot in 2009

Credit © LeAnn Mueller 2010

I wasn't trying to impersonate Stevie Ray Vaughan or anybody. It's a guy playing a blues-gospel melody, not showboating. There's this craze of people fetishing on the "right" Stratocaster with the "right" overdrive, trying to emulate Stevie Ray Vaughan, and it's a sin.'

The gear Joe used in the studio was subtly different this time around. The solos for *Dream Song*, *Wormhole Wizards* and *Wind In The Trees* are all performed with a Sustainiac-equipped JS2100; similarly, he used a Sansamp plug-in for the main guitar parts. 'It wound up being the coolest sound.'

Guitar-wise, aside from his signature Ibanez range, his choices ranged from his 1948 Martin 000-21 on *Littleworth Lane* through to a '59 Strat for the melody on *Two Sides To Every Story* and a '59 Gibson L-5 for 'that "underwater" sound on *Wind In The Trees*. The two JS2400s were the two main guitars, that and the JS2100 with the Sustainiacs.'

Amp-wise, Joe parted company amicably with Peavey last year and has been working with Marshall. A modified JVM410 was a guest star on the album and a signature amp may turn up later next year. A signature Ibanez acoustic, the all-black JSA, was road-tested on the Chickenfoot tour, while the Ice9 pedal offers a choice between vintage and modern overdrive. 'A lot of the older overdrive pedals are really bass-deficient,' says Joe, 'so we added a knob that slowly increases the lows to kind of fatten it out in a natural, amp-like way.'

> *'People fetishing on the "right" Strat with the "right" overdrive, trying to emulate Stevie Ray Vaughan– it's a sin'*

Chickenfoot played their final shows of the year in September, after which Satriani, Sammy Hagar, Michael Anthony and Chad Smith were faced with synchronising their schedules. 'Ever since I finished this record I've been doing nothing but Chickenfoot demos in my home studio,' Joe reveals. 'I've got down 10 songs and I'd like to get another 10 before I hit the road on the solo tour. Everyone can sit and pore over my demos for a while – then they can pick their favourites and slag the ones they hate!

'Sammy's busy writing lyrics to demos I've already sent him. We were originally scheduled to get together in late September, but the Chili Peppers have changed their schedule, so now we may not find each other as a band again until late January.' It looks as if Satch's Filofax for 2011 is beginning to fill up nicely...

Credit © LeAnn Mueller 2010

DID YOU KNOW?

- Satriani recently borrowed a '59 Les Paul from Mike Dirnt for recording
- He plans a studio collaboration with former pupil Steve Vai 'sometime soon'
- He has been a perpetual Grammy nominee since 1987, but has yet to win
- His most admired current guitarist is Billy Gibbons: 'He's a genius!

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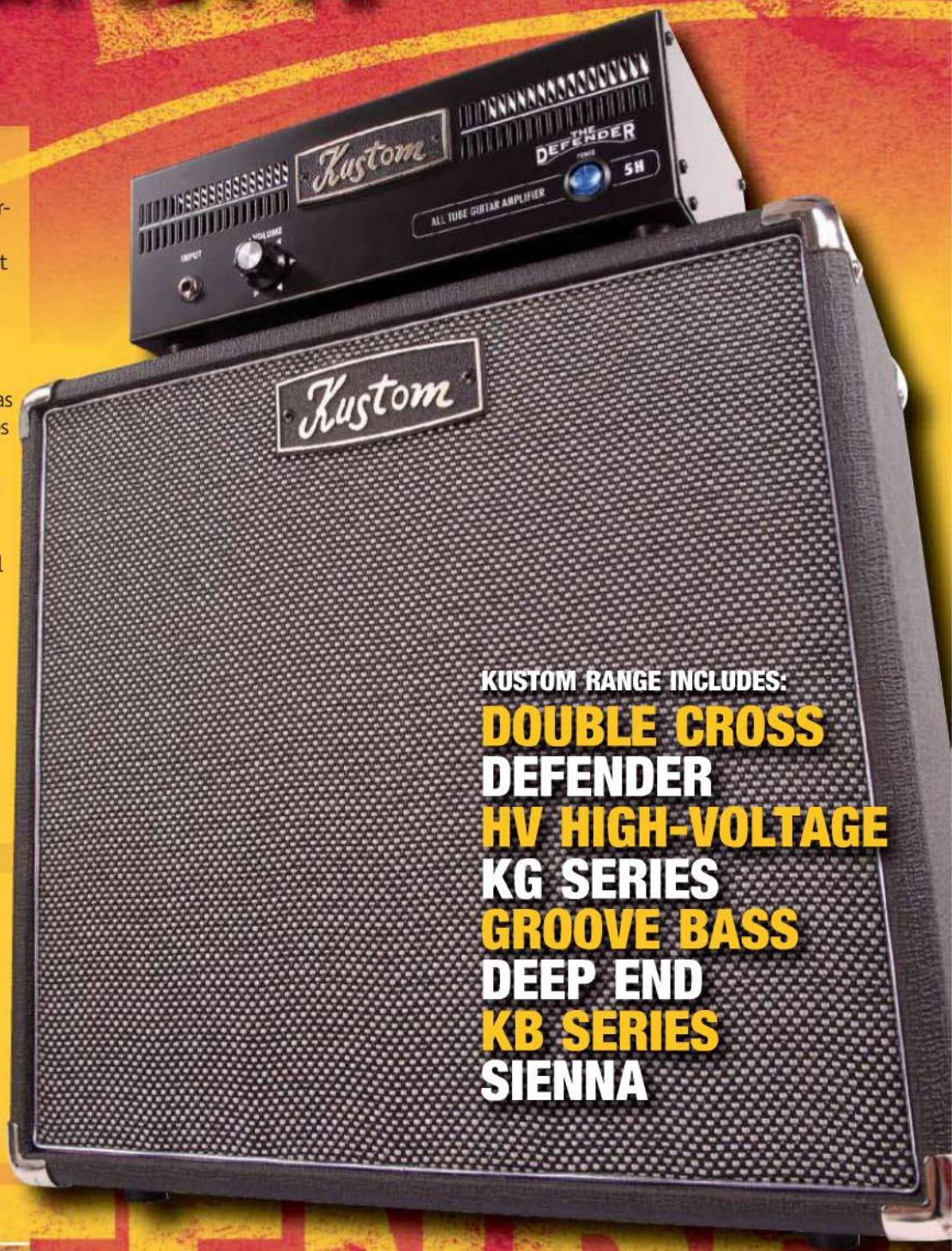

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The Musical One

From Sex Pistol to Rich Kid to Spectre to Philistine to, well, a Sex Pistol again, bassist, guitarist and songwriter Glen Matlock has always been a creative pivot. Alan Clayson clocks his career

Nowadays, The Sex Pistols are as much part of the national furniture as, well, Vera Lynn – to whose *There'll Always Be An England* they trooped on at 2008's Isle of Wight Festival. Rather than the angry scowls of yore, a middle-aged joviality pervaded a bill-topping recital by drummer Paul Cook, guitarist Steve Jones, frontman Johnny Rotten – and, on bass, 52-year-old Glen Matlock, to whom nature seems has been kindest.

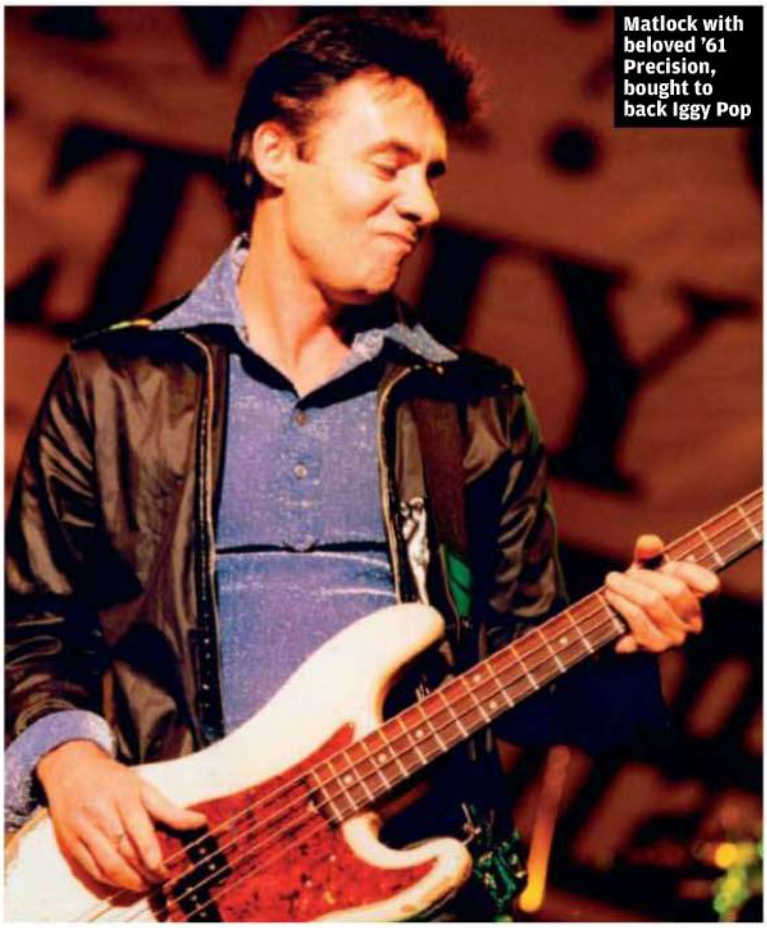
In the press enclosure, you could have overheard someone refer to Matlock as 'the musical one'. It's a justifiable description. Though the Pistols' headline-hogging outrage had continued under the management of Malcolm McLaren following Matlock's exit from the group in February 1977, artistically, let's face it, it was downhill all the way.

'I feel that the first three Pistols singles were down to me musically – and *Pretty Vacant* was mine lyrically as well. Also, many of the arrangements boiled down to how I'd conceived them on just voice and acoustic,' Glen affirms with quiet pride during rehearsals this summer for what promises to be an intriguing stint with a reconstituted Faces.

How did the Faces gig come about? 'I kind of volunteered,' he admits, 'because if there'd been no Faces, there'd have been no Sex Pistols. They'd been common ground between me, Steve, Paul and our first guitarist, Wally Nightingale. They looked cool and they were the one major band that couldn't care less, kicking footballs around the stage and so forth.'

A take-it-or-leave-it approach also informed the trajectory of the Pistols, even if Glen was gratified by various covers of *Pretty Vacant*, most conspicuously by the Who and the Damned – and Paul Jones, whose string-drenched slow version disappointed its composer. 'The riff wasn't in it,' he sighs. 'It sounded like Mantovani.'

Matlock's later work, however successful, has always been measured against the early punk days. Certainly, his Sex Pistols membership was a selling point when, on the rebound, he formed the Rich Kids with Midge Ure and Steve New – each on the periphery of the Pistols' scene in 1975 – plus drummer Rusty Egan. 'The last thing I wanted,' stresses Glen, 'was to come over as second-division punk like Chelsea or the Cockney Rejects. We distanced ourselves from all that.'



Matlock with beloved '61 Precision, bought to back Iggy Pop

'I feel the first three Sex Pistols singles were down to me musically – and Pretty Vacant was mine lyrically as well'

Catalogue

THE SEX PISTOLS: NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS (1977)

The hits that mattered are supplemented by B-sides and on-stage staples on this phonographic equivalent of bottling lightning

THE RICH KIDS: GHOSTS OF PRINCES IN TOWERS (1978)

A lively LP epitomised by the opener's deployment of bass and an overhaul of the Small Faces' *Here Come The Nice*

GLEN MATLOCK & THE PHILISTINES: BORN RUNNING (2010)

'It wasn't intended to be either old-fashioned or state-of-the-art, just an album with which I was happy,' says Matlock of his latest

Gear

Three Fender Precision basses (white, black and sunburst)
Rickenbacker 4001 bass
1992 Gibson ES335 Dot
Gibson Les Paul Junior
Guild D30 acoustic
Gibson J-45 acoustic
Fender Bassman ('the Mk2 Jaguar of bass amps, bought for £99 about 25 years ago')
Fender 300 Bassman head and cabinets
Marshall 25/50 Jubilee head
Marshall 50W valve combo

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Precisions all the way: a black Mexican P-bass, a real '61 that's now retired, and a USA vintage reissue

Glen's acoustics: a Guild D-30 and a Gibson J-45

Right: a Gibson LP Jr reissue and a blonde ES-335 Dot

'I'm a Precision bloke. With a Jazz, people think you're a bit good and you've got problems before you've even started'

An album, *Ghosts Of Princes In Towers*, and a spin-off single *Rich Kids* sold sufficiently to hold on hoping... but not hopefully enough for Egan and Ure. 'They wanted to incorporate synthesisers – which I've nothing against, but I didn't want to us to be tarred with the same brush as the New Romantics,' shrugs Glen. 'I felt a bit let down, but in a later conversation with Malcolm he reckoned that while London had absorbed punk and what the Rich Kids were trying to do, the rest of the country hadn't caught up. Maybe we were ahead of our time.'

When the Rich Kids went under Matlock backed Iggy Pop, a tenure notable for its anticipation of the musicians' basic needs. 'I couldn't believe how professional the set-up was: booze for the band, leads that worked – and roadies.' Refreshing too was a period spent with the Spectres, fronted by Glen and Danny Kustow from the Tom Robinson Band, which commenced trading with a horn section 'a bit like The Dave Clark Five'.

Then Matlock drifted from project to fleeting project until it made fiscal sense for the most unlikely-to-regroup combo to reactivate themselves.

Basic Instinct: A Glen Matlock Gear File

The Rickenbacker 4001 bass Matlock played with the Sex Pistols is currently on display at the British Music Experience rock museum... but he's very much a Fender player these days anyway. 'I'm a Precision bloke. I always think if you walk on stage with a Jazz Bass people think you're a bit good! You're creating problems for yourself before you've even started.'

Glen's white '61 P-bass was originally bought for a stint backing Iggy Pop in 1979. He's not too keen to gig it these days... not since it was grabbed from the stage and his band had to chase the perpetrator down the road to retrieve it. A black Mexican Precision generally takes its place these days; the neck on his American sunburst P-bass is just a fraction too wide.

With the Philistines Glen plays six-string. His mainstay is a blonde ES-335 Dot reissue picked up after the Pistol's profitable *Filthy Lucre* tour. A recent addition is a Les Paul Jr which is new but fairly rare because it has a '60s-style neck and a '50s body – basically the Billie Joe Armstrong model without the signature. When playing solo acoustic sets he favours his warm-sounding Gibson J-45 as he finds he's prone to break strings on his old Guild D-30.

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A Strange Effect

Glen is a fan of '60s singer Dave Berry. 'I was a huge fan from the days of *Ready Steady Go*,' he reveals. 'The Pistols revamped his song *Don't Gimme No Lip Child*. Also, The Spectres' first single was a reworking of *This Strange Effect*, composed for Dave in 1965 by Ray Davies, another hero.

'In the mid-'80s I went to see Dave at a London club called Legends. He made an announcement about *Strange Effect* being a big hit for "both me and my great friend Glen Matlock." Afterwards, I approached him when he was signing autographs. "Who are you?" he asked. I said, "I'm your great friend Glen Matlock..."'

'The challenge of a solo club show makes me far more nervous than appearing in front of 20,000 people with the Pistols'

Even the Beatles succumbed, albeit on disc only - though, for many, *Free As A Bird* almost-but-not-quite topping the domestic chart wasn't nearly as piquant as an exhumed Sex Pistols appearing on *Top Of The Pops* in the spring of 1996.

The reunion coincided with a maiden Matlock solo album, *Who's He Think He Is When He's At Home*, a record that revealed an assured and tuneful baritone. 'I had a try at lead vocals at the start of the Rich Kids and I regret not sticking to my guns,' mourns Matlock. 'If you've written words containing sentiments that you hold dear, nobody's going to sing them with the same kind of conviction... so I thought I'd give it another go.'

Two further albums in his own right, *Open Mind* and *On Something*, preceded a latest - and most impressive - Matlock offering, *Born Running*. As well as demonstrating that he retains a knack for catchy hooks, Glen also remains blessed with the ability to concentrate on the possible with a dozen mostly verse-chorus-middle-eight selections. 'It's sort of classic rock,' he explains. 'There's some heartfelt stuff on there. The title track, for example, relates to me nearing my 50th birthday and friends dropping by the wayside.'

Indeed, for all the up-tempo drive, there's a shadowy link here with the 'beautiful sadness' of Jacques Brel, the chansonier who was both a figure and eminence grise of 20th century songwriting. 'Something I wrote for Iggy, *Ambition*, was influenced by Brel,' Glen agrees. 'One of the prime-time TV shows when I was young was *Sunday Night At The London Palladium*. You'd see beat groups on it but you'd also have the likes of Rod McKuen, who translated Brel for the English-speaking market.

'I kept hearing these fantastic Brel songs without realising who'd written them. In the 1970s I heard the Sensational Alex Harvey Band's *Next* - originally *Au Suivant* - and I got into Scott Walker. I also liked *She* by Charles Aznavour, though I was never sure why.'

Excerpts from *Born Running* are likely to feature in Matlock performances with both his accompanying Philistines - and, proving no slouch on acoustic guitar, entirely alone. 'I enjoy the bombast and camaraderie of being in a group,' he confesses, 'but the challenge of a solo show on a club stage makes me far more nervous than appearing before 20,000 people with the Pistols, hiding behind all the noise.'

DID YOU KNOW?

- Among Glen's first records were Twist And Shout and You Really Got Me
- In 1989 he played with pre-punk reprobates The Pretty Things
- Glen's memoir I Was A Teenage Sex Pistol was published in 1990 by Omnibus
- The Rich Kids reformed for a benefit in 2010 for Steve New, who was terminally ill

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Garbage Man

Matt Verta-Ray provides blistering guitar for New York's garage rockabilly outfit Heavy Trash and has a studio stuffed with desirable valve-powered obscurities. Interview by Steve Bailey

Take a step into New York's NY Hed studio and your ears will be rewarded with the sound of ancient amps and the ring of joyously authentic slapback echo. You're surrounded by as fine a collection of vintage kit as you could hope to find in any working studio; welcome to the lair of 21st century rockabilly guitar hero Matt Verta-Ray.

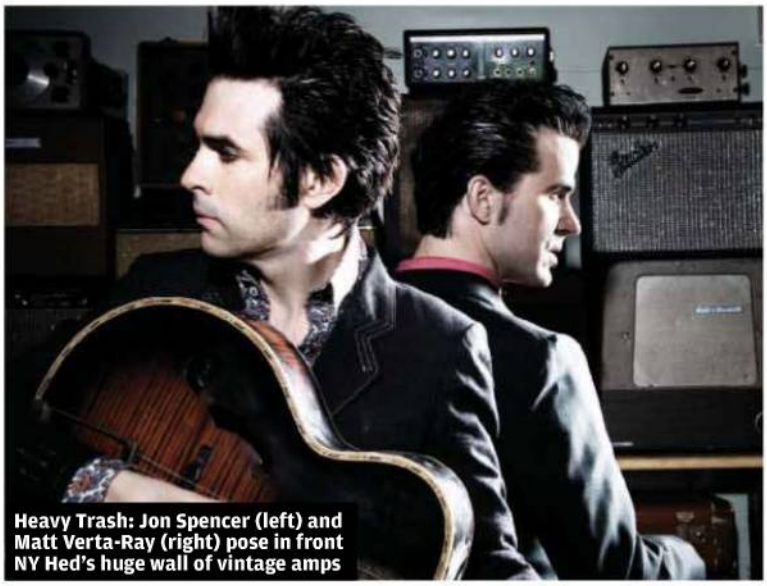
Many bands flock to the retro haven of London's Toerag studio – and so do Matt's own band Heavy Trash when they're in town – but few are aware that Manhattan boasts its own well-appointed analogue cave. 'My studio is sort of like Toerag West, in a way,' confirms Matt. 'It's all tube gear, old compressors and tube mics. We have vintage amps and guitars on every available surface.'

Some studio owners are leery about letting customers play all the gear. Not here: everything you see is ready for use, and Matt will even stick around and engineer for you. 'The tape is wide, the reels are heavy and the amps are warm,' he grins. 'Everything feels right that way. The songs almost write themselves.'

It seems there are plenty who agree, and NY Hed is booked solid even in these difficult times. 'You would have thought that with the economic downturn people would be like "Well, honey, we're going to have to cut back on our analogue recording,"' Matt considers, 'but it's been totally the opposite. I have trouble squeezing in my own projects.'

It all started when Matt's old band Madder Rose had a run of healthy record sales in the 1990s and the lucky chap found himself with 'drawers full of money and a distorted view of the economy'. He took the opportunity to indulge in his retro gear obsession to the hilt.

'Sometimes I'd buy stuff because it looked so amazing I thought there'd just be no way this could sound bad – and most of the time it was a good call. If you see a battleship grey enamel-painted box with German writing on it, chances are it's going to sound really great. I was lucky enough to get some really great stuff before it all got so collectable.'



Heavy Trash: Jon Spencer (left) and Matt Verta-Ray (right) pose in front NY Hed's huge wall of vintage amps

'T've gone through Gretsch guitars like popcorn... but T've never found another one that's as magical as my 6119'

Matt's tastes were formed by his parents' collection of 45s and 78s from the likes of Buddy Holly and Johnny Cash. He developed a taste for the quirkier elements of rock'n'roll while he played bass with Madder Rose, and then moved onto guitar with New York sonic anarchists Speedball Baby. A record collection full of eccentric rockabilly and a studio bursting with valve-driven boxes, helped forge a friendship with frontman Jon Spencer of New York's bombastic power trio The Blues Explosion. The result: the twin six-string attack of Heavy Trash and their latest album *Moonlight Serenade*, a foot-stompin' tour de force.

'We both love rockabilly, but if you get hung up on a genre it can be a real trap. Once you've got the haircuts, the tattoos and the fuzzy dice, where are you gonna go?' says Matt. 'We've just started our fourth album, so we've burned through all our stylistic conceits. What comes out is now is a little more natural.'

A large chunk of what comes out is channelled through Matt's prized '59 Gretsch 6119 Chet Atkins Tennessean. 'I've gone through Gretsches like popcorn!' he exclaims, 'but I've never found another one as magical as my 6119. I traded it for a '50s Tele during the '80s. Back then you could buy a '50s guitar for like $800, so I saved my paper round and snow-shovelling money.'

The Tennessean was originally a single pickup model but at one point an enterprising Eddie Cochran fan added a P90 at the neck. Matt is addicted to the Filtertron at the bridge, though, so the P90 is obsolete. 'In my estimation it's the best pickup ever made. It's kind of

Catalogue

HEAVY TRASH: MIDNIGHT SERENADE (2009)

The band hit top gear with menacing, pulp fiction-infused lyrics channelled through rockabilly rhythms, swampy blues and infectious riffage

HEAVY TRASH: GOING WAY OUT WITH HEAVY TRASH (2007)

The second album expanded horizons with some alt.country and garage rock in a slicker, more eclectic package that proved the project had legs

HEAVY TRASH: HEAVY TRASH (2005)

The debut was a celebration of quirky, boisterous rockabilly that stuck a little too close to the classic '50s template for some

Gear

Guitars: 1959 Gretsch 6119 Chet Atkins Tennessean, Gibson ES-295, Telecaster, Danelectro baritone and a Gibson LG-0 acoustic.
Amps: Fender Vox AC30, '50s Fender tweed Deluxe.
Effects: Echoplex tape delay or MXR analogue delay

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Matt at work: 'Being a good engineer is kinda like being a psychotherapist'

Photos (2): Ali Smith

Verta-Ray picks at his Gibson ES-295 while Spencer takes one of his occasional stints on the drums

NY Hed's dark corners hide vintage equipment of every description

trebly and doesn't have that throaty growl of the Gibson humbucker – really, it's like a slightly more chunky single coil.'

The Gretsch has been on something of a journey; it once spent an unplanned sabbatical in the Balkans. 'We were in Sarajevo with Speedball Baby in around 2000, only a few years after the Bosnian war. People were still angry and the vibe was harsh. After the show we were ripped off. They broke into our van and stole all our stuff including my guitar.'

A cautionary tale, but don't worry – there's a Disney ending. 'About three or four years ago I spotted it for sale on the internet and bought it back,' marvels Matt. 'It was just over the border in Croatia. I'm sure it wasn't the guy that stole it. I was so thrilled! And yeah, I still tour with it. To me, a guitar's only really valuable if you play it. This is an instrument to make music with.'

Matt also has a Danelectro baritone and a Tele, but another '50s hollowbody claims his number two spot – a 1955 Gibson ES-295 like Scotty Moore's. 'It just plays itself – it's almost like cheating,' says Matt. 'With big hollowbodies you really feel in touch with the physicality of the instrument. You gotta fight the Gretsch a bit more, which I like because you can hear that resistance in the music, but if I've not been playing for a while and I'm a little out of shape I pull out the Gibson until my muscles remember how to play.'

Happily there's a well-stocked back room full of guitars at the studio as well. 'It's nice just to have a pile of guitars that aren't in the front of your mind. If you suddenly think an SG or whatever would sound good, then you can usually find something that fits.'

'It's all valve gear, old compressors and tube mics. We have vintage amps and guitars on every available surface'

Then course then there's the wall of amps – mostly small and vintage, including Fenders, Silvertones, Ampegs and Matt's live choice, a Vox AC30. A simple '50s Fender tweed Deluxe serves as his go-to recording amp, but there's much more besides. Stand-out track *Good Man* from the latest LP features an unusual-sounding tremolo from a dusty old Magnatone. 'They called it True Tremolo,' Matt explains. 'It's not like a loud-soft, loud-soft effect, it's pitched up and down – it's just an amazing sound, a bit like a Leslie speaker.' Another fave is an old Ampeg Reverberocket. 'It's had some sort of modification that no one can figure out, but it gets this incredible overdrive tone. It's bright, clean and punchy when you need it to be but there's this crazy knob you turn and it just goes insane.'

Matt uses valves at every point possible. Tube microphones feed into Ampex mic preamps... and that's all before it gets to the compressors. 'If you can use compressors that have a tube in the signal path everything is just beautifully soggy and contained by the time it hits the tape. That's one of my secret weapons. Then the tape will kind of snug it all into place. There's some sort of strange chemistry that goes on.'

Matt happily admits that digital recording is a very useful resource, but for him there can be no substitute.

'Things suffer when you're using computers because at no point with programmes like Protools is the signal getting any love... it's all just number-crunching. With analogue it's all tubey and nice every stop along the way. And when you get into this studio, all of a sudden you're hearing echoes of the giants of the past, and it's inspiring.'

DID YOU KNOW?

- Matt's studio partner is Ivan Julian, ex-guitar man with Richard Hell And The Voidoids
- He also has a project with Gemma Ray called The Oubliettes. Album due in 2011
- Matt's heroes include Micky Baker, Link Wray, Charlie Feathers & Johnny Burnett Trio
- Verta-Ray's vocals get a rare outing on Good Man from Moonlight Serenade

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BARNES & MULLINS

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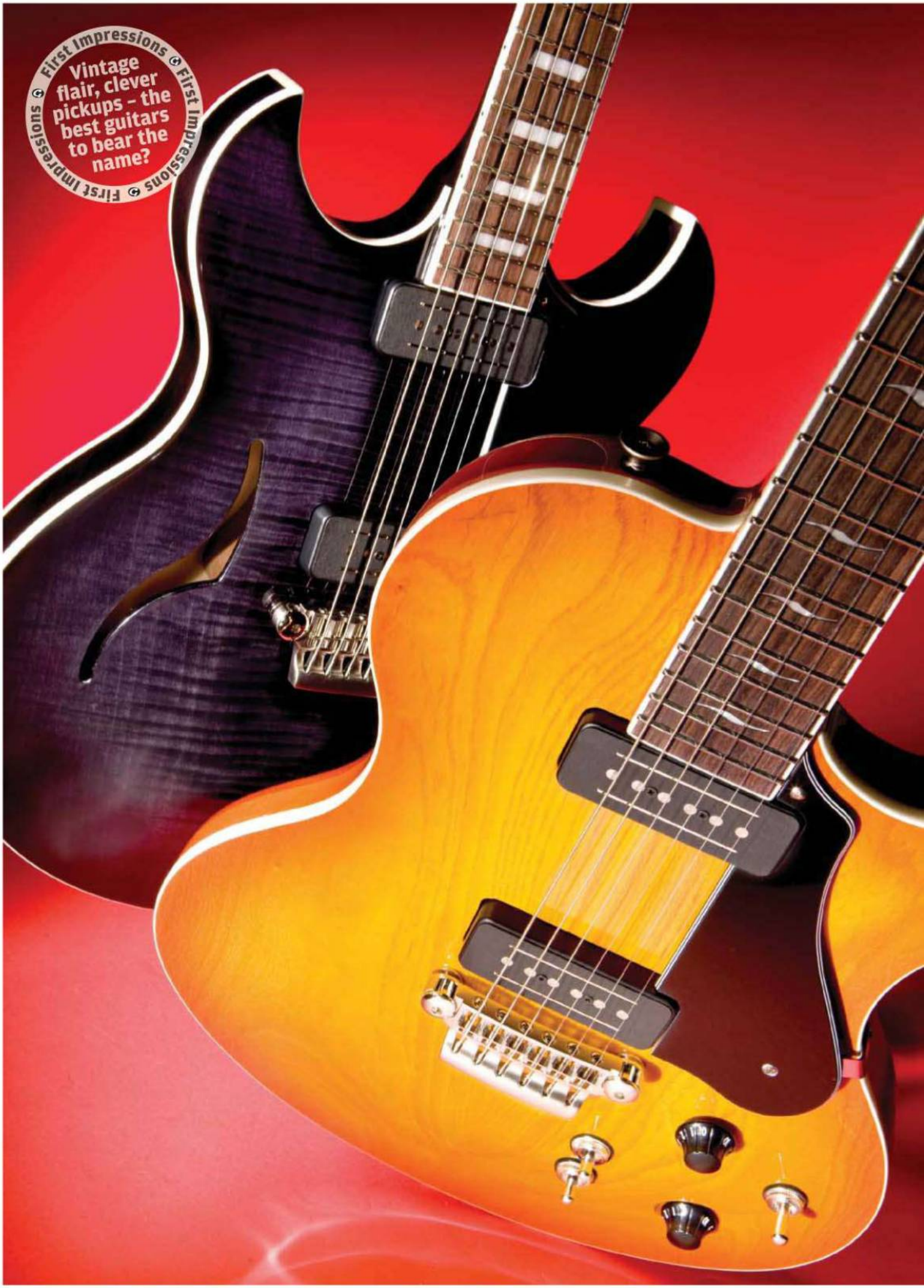

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Price: £704

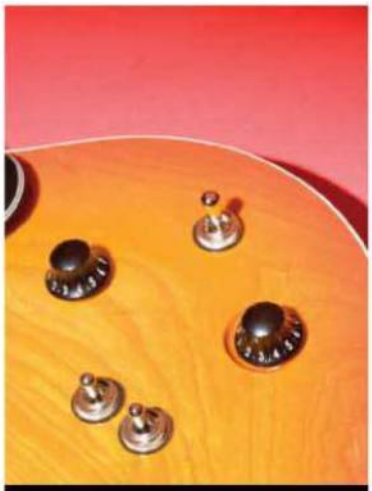
In the early '60s there were few guitars cooler than a Vox. Now, after years in the wilderness, they're back – and this time they play superbly well. Review by Huw Price

Vox

SSC 55 & HDC 77

We loved the style of the new Vox guitars when we spotted them at NAMM. We've got two for review, the SSC 55 and the HDC 77, and though they're quite different, the pair share many features. They've both got Vox CoAxe pickups: a coil of wire is wrapped around the central polepieces and then two magnetic blades are added plus a second 'silent' coil wrapped around the whole assembly. The Max Connect bridges are cast from solid aluminium and weigh only two ounces, allowing string vibration to transfer efficiently to the wood (each bridge saddle is adjustable, so there's no compromise on intonation). The three-way pickup selector is located beneath the volume and tone controls, and two three-position switches located behind the bridge tap the coils to produce single coil, P90 and humbucker-type tones, all with the same level of hum-cancellation.

CoAxe pickups have six polepieces plus two outer blades and a 'silent' outer coil for bucking the hum



The two mini-switches tap each pickup in three different places, giving a host of cool extra sounds

SSC 55

This solidbody is radically sculpted, with lines that catch and deceive the eye. The body is curved along its length, so it cleverly hugs the human frame. It's made of ash and mahogany layers of equal thickness, so the ash top actually protrudes about half an inch below the binding in some areas and the straight join between the two pieces of timber appears to run diagonally across the side. The natural curve of the body mimics the top chamfer of a Strat, and the heavily dished carve almost anchors your right arm in an ideal position. There's a generous rib rout at the back, and the depth of the neck tenon has allowed the designers to radically taper the heel so it's barely thicker than the neck itself.

The SSC 55 chimes, jangles and snaps – but it's a fantastically versatile guitar that handles overdrive and fuzz tones

The bound headstock seems to be integral to the neck rather than scarfe jointed, and the black front with the pearl logo looks very classy. The diecast Vox tuners have unusual 'S' shaped buttons that echo the fingerboard inlays.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	19/20
Vibe	19/20
TOTAL	**94%**

Good for... punk, indie, blues, rock, slide

Look elsewhere... for a vibrato. Otherwise, this'll do just about anything

FACTFILE

SSC 55

Description: Solidbody electric guitar. Made in Korea

Price: £704 inc. gig bag

Build: Bookmatched ash top and mahogany body with set mahogany neck, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, custom aluminium bridge, diecast imperial tuners

Electrics: Two switchable P90/humbucking pickups, master volume and tone with three-way pickup selector and coil tap switches

Left-hander: No

Finish: Teaburst, trans red, black, goldtop

Scale Length: 636mm/25"

Neck width:
Nut 42mm
12th fret 53mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 18mm
12th fret 20mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 52mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 3.5kg/7.7lbs

THE COMPETITION

GRETSCH
Electromatic G5236T

The import Duo-Jet repro: maple top, mahogany body and neck, 22-fret rosewood fretboard, two mini humbuckers and a Bigsby

RRP: £401

PRS
SE Single Cut

Affordable LP-chaser with curly veneer top over mahogany body, natural wood 'binding', stoptail bridge and two humbuckers

RRP: £564

GIBSON
Les Paul Studio

The lesser-ticket Lester Polfuss model with 490R/498T Alnico humbuckers, tune-o-matic/stopbar bridge, gold hardware

RRP: £813

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Price: £1292

FACTFILE

HDC 77

Description: Solidbody electric guitar. Made in Korea

Price: £1292 inc. case

Build: Bookmatched flame maple ply front and back with mahogany sides and centre block and set mahogany neck, 22-fret rosewood fingerboard, custom aluminium bridge, diecast tuners

Electrics: Two switchable P90/humbucking pickups, master volume and tone controls with three-way pickup selector and individual coil tap switches

Left-hander: No

Finish: Blackburst, siennaburst

Scale Length: 648mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 42mm
12th fret 52mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 19mm
12th fret 21mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 52mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3mm

Weight: 2.8kg/6.16lbs

Contact:
Korg UK
01908 857100
www.voxamps.com

THE COMPETITION

DUESENBERG
Double Cat Fireburst

A very Rick-esque semi-hollow in maple with a sustain centre block and vibrato. One Duesenberg DP90 Domino, one Grand Vintage humbucker, volume, tone, three-way switch

RRP: £1192

GIBSON
ES-335 Dot Plain Cherry

The classic semi-solid with maple ply body, mahogany neck, rosewood fretboard, two 57 Classic humbucker pickups, Grover tuners, ABR-1 bridge, nickel hardware

RRP: £1547

HÖFNER
Verythin Standard Cherry

Another fine reissue of the German 335-alike with a solid spruce centre block and a pair of Hofner Diamond humbuckers

RRP: £1204

The stylish curve of the HDC 77's horns recalls the Eko-made Vox Challenger semi of the late '60s

No rent-a-bridge hardware – these lightweight aluminium Max Connect units are unique to the Vox range

The HDC 77 sounds darker and richer; you can get jazzy tones and Gretschy sounds and it's a top-notch blues rocker

HDC 77

The shape of the semi-solid HDC 77's 'S' holes of the holes tallies with the tuner buttons, so it's odd that Vox decided to ditch the matching markers for pearl parallelograms. The back of the body is bound, creating a sharp contrast against the luscious trans black finish – it resembles a Gibson Johnny A from the front and a Rick 365 from the rear. Vox has once again tapered the heel and the line of the body between the cutaways has been shifted towards the bridge in a smooth arc. The result is upper fret access that rivals an SG, with no compromise on the wood-to-wood contact at the neck joint.

The body's mahogany core provides the sides and a centre block which stops just behind the bridge, designed to retain acoustic resonance while offering superior feedback rejection. The front and back are arched maple ply, with heavy flame on the outside surfaces.

SOUNDS

To think the SSC 55 was semi-hollow rather than solid would be an easy mistake. Acoustically, it's ultra-loud, resonant and packed with woody character; with its slightly flat medium-depth neck it plays effortlessly, and the fret work is pretty much perfect.

Acoustically, the HDC 77 is brighter, louder, livelier and more dynamically responsive. The playability and feel is pretty much identical but the heel taper and the shape of the body has dictated a strap button on the rear of the upper horn so the HDC 77 has a tendency to swing to the right, and the lower mass causes some neck-heaviness.

On both guitars, single coil mode provides a wonderful sense of clarity and transparency without excess treble, and each model's natural brightness comes through the pickups regardless of the coil tap settings. Things never gets as bright as an F-type single coil or as fat as a P90 or PAF; the transition between coil tap settings is smooth, but if you go directly from 'single coil' to 'PAF' the change is quite noticeable. The output level remains consistent, but the tone gains weight, thickness and bark.

The SSC 55 chimes, jangles and snaps in clean mode, always keeping a crisp, precise quality. String-to-string balance is very even, and the sustain is extremely impressive. Moving onto overdrive and distortion, it really starts to sing; none of the clean mode qualities are lost but the voices of the pickups become more pronounced. The bridge has more bite and aggression, while the neck takes on a rounded vocal quality. This is a fantastically versatile guitar that handles clean, overdrive and even fuzz tones.

Sound-wise the HDC 77 is unmistakably a semi-solid. It's darker than the SSC 55 – not so pure, but richer and more harmonically complex. In clean mode you can get jazzy tones from the neck pickup as well as some cool Gretschy sounds, especially when one or both pickups are tapped. With overdrive and distortion it's a top-notch blues guitar as well as a hard rocker in the Malcolm Young mode.

Soloing is a joy because the feedback fades in smoothly and it's so easy to control and manipulate. It would be hard to choose between these two.

VERDICT

With their sculpted bodies, impressive hardware and clever and effective pickups, these are amongst the best-looking, best-made, best-sounding and most original guitars we have reviewed for quite some time.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	19/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	19/20
TOTAL	**92%**

Good for... indie, fusion, jangle, blues, rock, Travis picking

Look elsewhere... for zero feedback, whammy bar action

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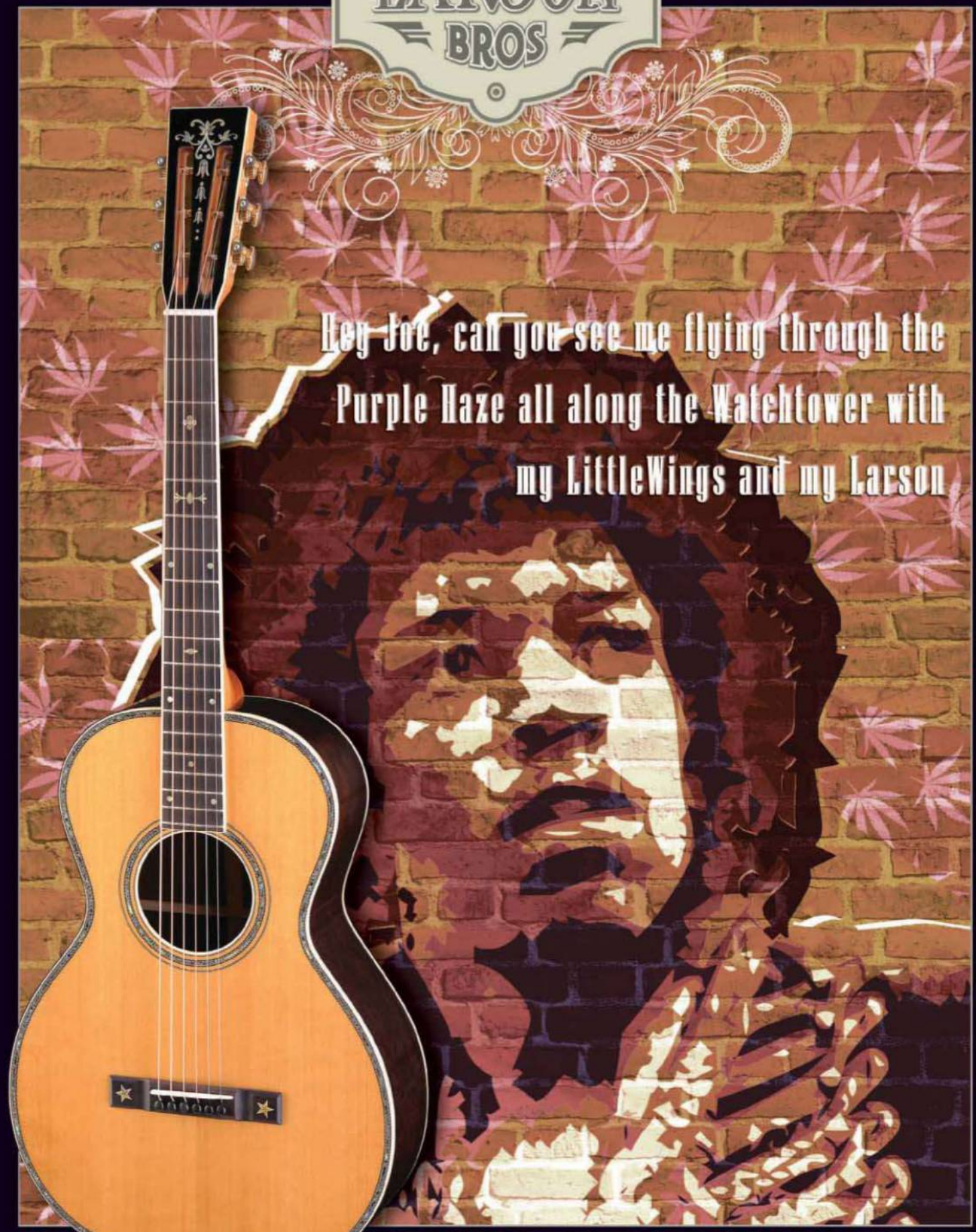

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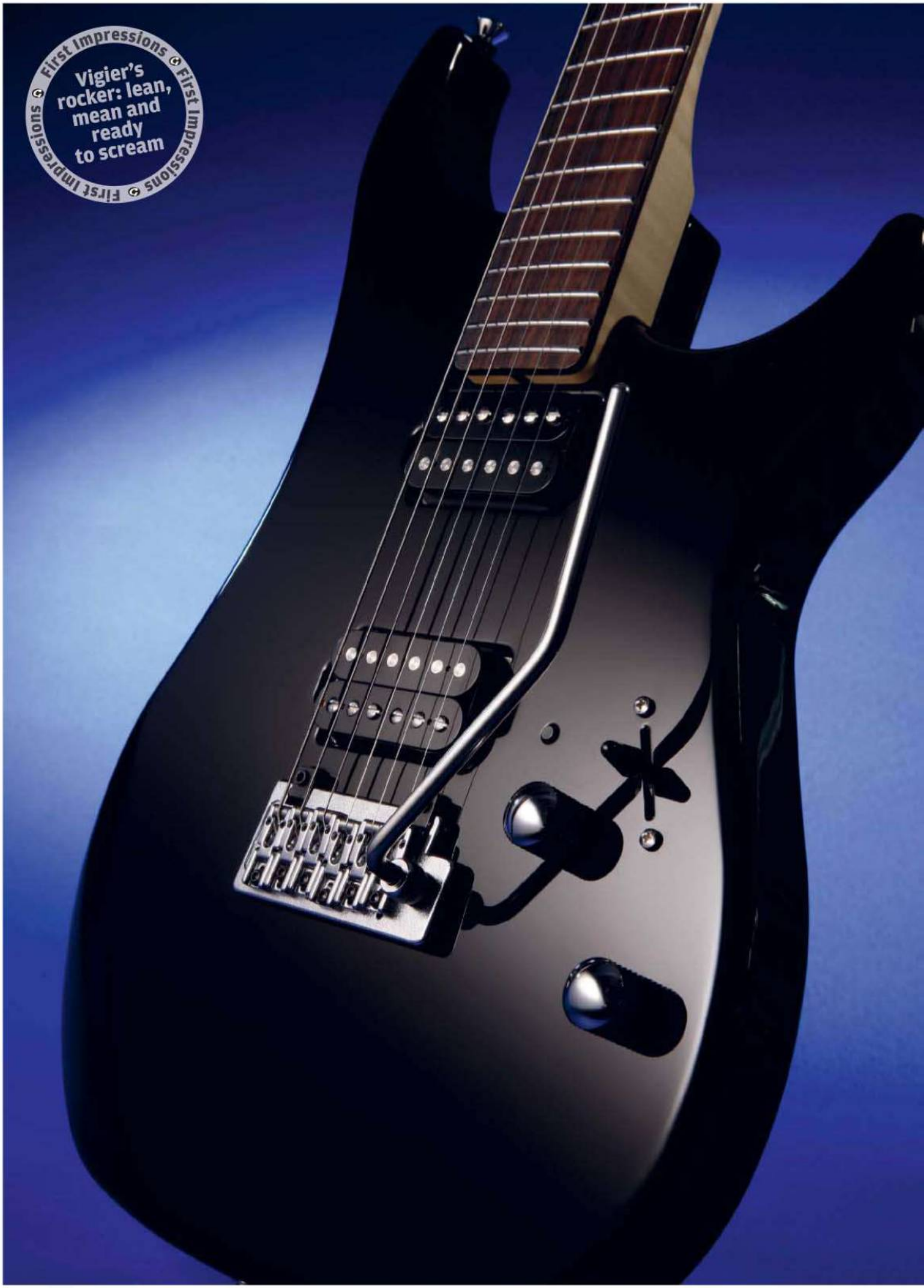

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Price: £1703

Available in black only, the Kaos is a special no-frills dragstrip version of the normally luxurious Excalibur, with Vigier's first-ever reverse headstock. Review by Richard Purvis

Vigier

Excalibur Kaos

Whichever way you spell it, chaos is not something you'd normally associate with Vigier, purveyors of tasteful and immaculately finished guitars since 1980. Under normal circumstances a spilt solder-blob would be enough to make company founder Patrice Vigier howl with despair, so does the Excalibur Kaos represent a dangerous new direction? Not exactly. Look very closely at the dot markers on the 12th fret – there's your chaos. Everything else on this guitar is as neat, shiny and perfect as we've come to expect. The mayhem will all have to come from you, the player.

In fact the Kaos has its origins not in Monsieur Vigier's French workshop but over here in the brain of his main man in the UK, Ben Whatsley. This is the guitar Ben has been begging his boss to make for several years – a no-nonsense axe for the metal player who wants quality without bling.

It may not look exactly rustic, but this is a stripped-down version of the Excalibur and that retail price is a good few hundred below what you'll pay for some others in the range. So there's no flashy flamed maple top and no sexy colour options – just the flat black of our review guitar. That, however, is as deep as the cost-cutting goes. Cosmetics aside, the build and hardware are bang up to the usual impeccable standards and the German-made Amber humbuckers are the same ones found on the £2200 Vigier GV Rock model.

How to mean-up the Kaos? Flip the headstock, add black paint: job done. Note slippery nut and zero fret

Locking tuners make the Kaos just a touch neck-heavy. The two mystery parts are the string tree mounts

This is a stripped-down version of the Excalibur but the build and hardware are up to the usual impeccable standards

So we're looking at a sleek, elegant superstrat in a 'matte varnish' finish (actually quite glossy). The two-piece alder body and maple neck are 'naturally aged' – don't worry, they're not forced to stay up late and smoke 40 Gitanes a day, just left in a dry environment – and that's for three years in the case of the neck, which is reinforced by the usual carbon strip instead of a truss rod. True to its metallic purpose, it's a fairly shallow neck and the fretboard radius is quoted as an ample 12". Behind the zero fret is a teflon nut, and behind that lies an upside-down headstock with chunky locking tuners. Flipping the standard Excalibur headstock shape was, Ben explains, a cost-effective way of reinforcing a modern, metal-friendly image. Those large (and rather stiff) tuners make the Kaos slightly neck-heavy, but not so much that it's about to wear a dent in your shoulder.

FACTFILE

EXCALIBUR KAOS

Description: Solid body electric guitar. Made in France

Price: £1703 including Vigier-branded Hiscox case

Build: Two-piece alder body, bolt-on maple neck reinforced with carbon strip, 24-fret rosewood fingerboard, Vigier vibrato bridge

Electrics: Two Amber Classic Hot humbuckers with five-way switch, master volume and tone controls plus killswitch

Left-handers: No

Finish: Black

Scale length: 650mm/25.6"

Neck width:
Nut 42mm
12th fret 52mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 19.5mm
12th fret 23mm

String spacing:
Nut 35mm
Bridge 53mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2mm

Weight: 3kg/6.6lbs

Contact: High Tech Distribution
01722 410002
www.vigierguitars.com

Scan: worldmags® & Journal-Plaza®

Price: £1703

THE COMPETITION

SUHR
Pro Series M4

Californian class act with satin-finished alder body and all-maple neck, Gotoh vibrato and high-output 'buckers with similar switching to the Vigier

RRP: £1799

TOM ANDERSON
Pro Am

The US boutique maker's breakthrough guitar from the superstrat's 1980s heyday is still going strong, and there's a variety of pickup configurations to choose from

RRP: £2499

FRAMUS
Diablo Progressive X

If you want to keep it European, this German beast has a natural satin mahogany body, Fender-scale maple neck, Floyd Rose and two Duncan humbuckers with five-way switching

RRP: £2067

Some Vigiers use Floyd Roses but this in-house job pivots on needle bearings, which should last longer than the average guitar - or indeed guitarist - without developing tuning issues. The two front mounting posts are adjustable for action while the roller saddles can be slid back and forth for intonation. It's a neat unit with good scope for divebombing, and returns to pitch more reliably than you might expect for a non-locking vibrato.

The high-powered Amber pups are controlled by a five-way switch that offers neck-only and bridge-only in positions 1 and 5, while the three settings in between give single-coil tones: neck, both or bridge. That's a decent range of options, though it does not allow for any mixing of SC and HB sounds, or even both humbuckers at once. From there the signal passes via a discreet killswitch just below the bridge pickup to an output jack stylishly recessed into the side of the body. One more feature: the pair of string trees for the E and A appear to be made of guitar string-ends, anchored at the back of the headstock. Recycling gone mad, or quirky innovation? They work fine, and if the whammy does develop any sticking or creaking problems this will not be the first place to look.

SOUNDS

You noticed the upside-down headstock, right? So let's dispense with the usual order of things and reach straight for the nastiest distortion pedal in the box. With everything cranked to cat-scaring point, the fun doesn't take long to break out. The Kaos plays and sounds a lot like the similarly-built Bfoot Excalibur we reviewed back in February, but with perhaps even more power thanks to the full-size neck humbucker. It's solid and authoritative on every string and every fret, only getting stronger as you screech your way up the ultra-playable neck and never losing clarity even on the front 'bucker. If you can shred at the speed of light, this guitar will go with you. With gain through the roof there's not much to distinguish between the pickup settings, but still enough to make you thankful for them. Here the machine-gunning killswitch and flailing whammy bar become essential parts of your satanic armoury, even if you never realised it before, and the promised chaos is well and truly here. Detune the low E to D for muted speed-metal chuggage and within five minutes you'll grow a tattoo.

Phew. And now, just for the record, we'll turn off the dirt. True to type, the acoustic sound is full and lush in a sweet but neutral way, with little in the way of top-end sizzle. Plugged into a clean amp it's the same story but louder - all purity and sustain in a manner that Strat and Les Paul fans may find just too pristine. It can be a tad spiky in single-coil mode so might need some taming later on in the signal chain; the humbucking tones are perhaps better-balanced. It's all relentlessly hi-fi, with just a hint of Fendery cluck on the middle setting to reassure you that this is a guitar, not a grand piano. A dab of '80s-style chorus will nail those 'listen out for the non-heavy bit' tones à la Metallica or Slint... but come on, enough of this, let's get filthy again. You don't buy a Lamborghini to pootle around the car park at Homebase, do you?

German-made Amber pickups, Vigier's own vibrato... and spot the stealth killswitch, too

The Kaos is solid, authoritative and ultra-playable. If you can shred at the speed of light, this guitar will go with you

Vigier's carbon reinforced necks will stay true under conditions of Extreme Rock

VERDICT

Fender have their Highway Ones and Gibson have their Fadeds - clearly there's a market for players who just want the tone and will happily forgo the lush looks if it means saving a couple of hundred quid. If this market also exists at the well-heeled end of the metal fraternity, then Vigier is onto a winner. There is simply nothing that could make this guitar any better at the job it's been designed for.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	20/20
Playability	20/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	91%

Good for... metal, metal and metal

Look elsewhere... for purple figured tops and diamond-encrusted strap buttons

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Price: £1800

Whether your tastes run to sweet country cleans, edge-of-breakup rock or roaring blues, this maker can provide the correct tool for the task in hand. Review by Rick Batey

Damian Probett

International H1 & Rapide 5.9

Damian Probett's website tag line – Individual Modern Vintage – is a neat way of describing the work of this Surrey luthier. He's been a pro builder since 2004 and works as a repairer at Charlie Chandler's Guitar Experience. Basing his output around three models, Probett offers many options – neck profiles, finishes, hardware, controls and more – to maximise the chances that any guitar ordered will be a perfect fit.

RAPIDE 5.9

Probett's LP-influenced Rapide comes in two forms – the slab-bodied 5.2 and the carved-top 5.9. An offset outline with double cutaway styling brings it up to date. The timbers are hugely impressive. The body is one piece of mahogany; viewed from the butt end, the sweep of the slab-cut grain is a sight to behold. The bookmatched maple top combines nice figure with characterful grain... it looks natural and organic. The weight, without any chambering, is a medium-light 8lbs.

The neck is also one piece of mahogany, without even any headstock 'wings'. It's very straight-grained, cut only a few degrees off the quarter, and set into the body via a long-tenon joint for maximum vibration transfer. A subtle triangular chamfer minimises mass at the heel. The 24.6"-scale fingerboard is Madagascar rosewood, thought by many to be the next best thing sonically and looks-wise to Brazilian. The headstock veneer is straight-grained ebony.

Hardware is well-chosen, including a TonePros wraparound bridge and German-made Haussel pickups

The neck profile on our review guitar is like a '59-meets-'60 Les Paul. Tuners are keystone-button Grovers

The timbers are impressive: a one-piece mahogany neck and a one-piece mahogany body with flamed maple top

The smell of nitro-cellulose in the morning is a fine thing, and Probett's finish is thinner and more delicate and tactile than the impervious high-gloss of many factory guitars. The top has a subtle faded burst; the back, sides and neck are a vintage-like dark orange. We can't fault it. The front edge of the body and the fingerboard are both bound in cream plastic, a shade matched by the pickup surrounds. Decoration is understated:

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**87%**

Good for... classic rock, blues, jazz

Look elsewhere... for a more famous name on the headstock, if it bothers you

FACTFILE

RAPIDE 5.9

Description: Solidbody electric guitar. Made in UK

Price: £1800

Build: Flamed maple cap, one-piece mahogany body. 24.625" scale mahogany neck with long tenon joint. Bound board, abalone markers. Ebony headstock facing

Hardware: TonePros bridge, Grover tuners, Haussel pickups, two volumes, two tones, three-way switch

Options: Any neck profile/radius, P90s, nut from 42-44mm, custom controls

Left-handers: Yes, to order

Finishes: Any, to order

Scale length: 625mm/24.625"

Neck width:
Nut 43mm
12th fret 52mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 23mm
12th fret 25mm

String spacing:
Nut 37mm
Bridge 52mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.3mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm

Weight: 8.1lb/3.68kg

THE COMPETITION

MARTYN BOOTH
Classic

Tip-top UK-built maple/mahogany electric with options inc. body chambers

RRP: from £2895

COLLINGS
360

Offset single-cut carved top with maple top and Lollar mini-buckers. Clear and frighteningly well-built

RRP: £3000

GROSH
Set Neck Custom

Super high-end carved-top single-cut from US small shop maker, fitted with Lindy Fralin humbuckers

RRP: £3600

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Price: £2100

FACTFILE

INTERNATIONAL H1

Description: Semi-hollowbody electric guitar. Made in UK

Price: £2100

Build: Hollowed alder body with swamp ash cap, two-piece maple and walnut neck with 25.5" scale Madagascar rosewood fingerboard

Hardware: Lollar '50s Wind P90s, Hipshot vibrato bridge, Sperzel tuners, 1 x Vol, 1 x Tone, three-way selector

Options: Any neck profile, pickups inc. single coils, P90s, humbuckers, Wide Range humbuckers; fixed bridge; nut widths from 42mm to 44mm; any fingerboard radius inc. compound; custom controls

Left-handers: Yes, to order

Finishes: Any, to order

Scale length: 647mm/25.5"

Neck width:
Nut 43mm
12th fret 51mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 23.5mm
12th fret 26mm

String spacing:
Nut 37mm
Bridge 52mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.8mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm

Weight: 6.3lb/2.86kg

Contact:
Damian Probett
01420 520213
www.probettguitars.co.uk

THE COMPETITION

FRET-KING
Green Label Country Squire Semitone Deluxe

UK-built semi-hollow T-style with Wilkinson vibrato and bolt-on neck. Normally comes with three pickups, but they'll do two P90s

RRP: £1899

MUSIC MAN
Axis Super Sport Tremolo MM90

Lightweight USA design with vibrato and two P90 pickups with Silent Circuit. Brilliant neck, underrated guitar

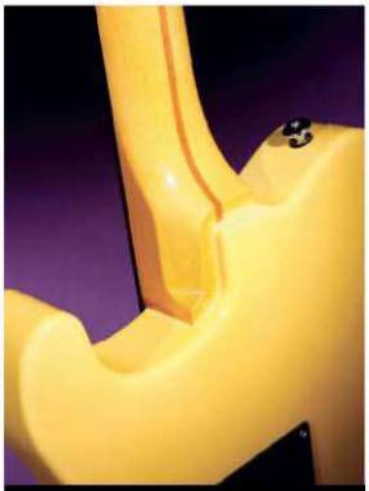
RRP: £1810

GORDON SMITH
Classic T

Hugely affordable UK-built T-style, very light weight, with various pickup options. Not as posh nor as customisable, but a bargain

RRP: From £649

The P90s are slightly underpowered '50s Winds made by Jason Lollar. We couldn't have picked any better



The maple set neck's heel is cleverly stepped and beautifully carved. It's practically a work of sculpture

Lollar P90s combined with the spank and responsiveness of a super-light hollowbody is an enticing prospect

the logo is formed by the letters D and P entwined, and pearl is the choice for the fingerboard markers and the side dots.

The hardware is a string of big names. Tuners are keystone-button Grover Deluxes; the pickups – one zebra-bobbined, one all-black – are Haussels (P90s are an option). The bridge is a TonePros wraparound. The two volumes and two tones have dark gold barrel knobs, the three-way toggle is amber plastic-tipped, and the strap buttons have large, stage-ready flanges.

SOUNDS

Probett's choice of Haussels is driven by a search for versatile vintage tone. The medium-output CT-HB-Vin neck pickup has alnico II magnets for a soft, round, rich response, but it's clear and defined enough for leads. The neck is alnico V, and hot enough to create a perfect balance between neck and bridge. It has more aggressive upper mids, but it's also transparent and dynamic – great for snarly blues and rock. The middle position is poppy and subtle. These pickups are real quality, and we're fans.

INTERNATIONAL H1

The 'International' name covers a Tele-inspired range which includes solids and hollow bodies, 'G' and 'F' scale lengths and pretty much every pickup in the rainbow. This H3's chassis is a hollowed-out alder body capped with a slab of ash plus a two-piece maple set neck with a walnut strip. A narrow forearm chamfer keeps the slab-body look while helping comfort. This guitar is spectacularly light at just a shade over 6lbs – light enough to require the aid of a grippy strap. All praise again to the thin nitro finish: here it's clear on the neck and both semi-opaque and trans butterscotch on the body.

The neck has a 25.5"-scale Madagascar fingerboard and is fairly big and beefy (this maker offers many neck carves based on three Cs, two Vs and a 'Big Boy', so your needs will be covered). The head is a slim six-per-side with a straight string path. As with the 5.9 the frets are faultless, and while this one's action is higher, it's still slick. All Probetts are set up on a Plek machine, so nut height, fingerboard relief and action are spot-on.

Tuners are Sperzels; the vibrato is a Hipshot (we'd choose a fixed bridge, but it efficiently delivers shimmers and deep dips); the cutaway guard is black for a '52 look; the jack is an Electrosocket. Controls are Vol and Tone with knurled Tele knobs, and the switch is an amber-tipped toggle.

SOUNDS

Beefy P90s combined with the spank and responsiveness of a super-light hollowbody – it's an enticing prospect. Slightly underwound, with degaussed magnets, these Lollar '50s Winds have plenty of girth yet there's an articulate twang amongst the roundness and a springy echo perhaps courtesy of the vibrato that makes them just the ticket for clean lines and alt-country leads. Up the volume on a Fender amp and they begin to break up sweetly; turning to a Marshall, they're monsters. For sweetness, clarity and balance Lollars are among our favourite P90s, and likely to stay that way.

VERDICT

There's no being-kind-to-the-small-maker in this review. Probett's guitars are totally pro from top to toe – lightweight and well-finished, with superb timbers, fine hardware, thoughtful detailing and silky set-ups. Above all they're practical and musical, and not unreasonably priced for handmade one-offs which come with a level of builder/player involvement that's guaranteed to boost the chances of nailing a great custom guitar.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	17/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	15/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**84%**

Good for... country, rock, blues, indie

Look elsewhere... for a custom-made S-type

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Price: £547 & £439

Think Oranges are one-trick wonders? With a powerful Shape dial and an all-new dirty channel, the Thunder 30 promises to be anything but. Review by Martin Wheeler

Orange

TH30 Head & PPC410 Cab

Things really are bright in Orange's world right now. The incredible success of both the Tiny and Dual Terror portable amps built on the resurgence in popularity and the heightened profile of a UK-based company that had already been steadily building throughout the noughties. Whatever they've been putting in their tea over in OMEC in the last few years, let's hope that they continue. The results of late have been real 'player's amps' that are not only simple and intuitive to use, but look distinctive and are built to a high quality at realistic prices. They eschew any unnecessary nonsense knobs and paraphernalia, and the results, while log-fallingly simple to use, have been complex-sounding amps that cover a whole lot of musical ground and styles.

Fresh off the Chinese production line is this tweaked and remodelled take on the popular Rocker amp which Orange have rebadged as the Thunder 30. There are important differences, though - this isn't just a quick lick of paint and a rub over with turtle wax. For starters there's a clean channel with its own dedicated EQ and the addition of a warm, valve-driven FX loop. For high gain lovers, there also the juicy prospect of a Dirty channel which promises the most gain of any amp Orange has ever made.

For high-gain lovers, the juicy prospect of a Dirty channel promises the most gain of any amp Orange has yet made

The guts of all this potential loveliness is a quartet of EL84 power valves and four EC883 preamp valves as well as a EC881 in the effects loop. Usefully, the EL84s can be tamed from the full 30W output down to 15 and then 7W for practice room and recording.

The handsome coat of arms, logo and chrome bumpers on the control panel are completed by Orange's familiar 'symbols' scheme on the central orange stripe. Below this are three chunky chrome selector switches for power on/off, full/half and standby, then the dirty/clean channel selector. There's an input round the back for a footswitch, but the amp isn't supplied with one. Next up are the Dirty channel rotaries - a master Volume and intriguingly named Shape and Gain knob - then the three controls for the clean channel: Treble, Bass and Volume.

The back boasts a sturdy metal grille and beneath that the base of the white steel chassis/panel pokes out.

FINAL SCORE: TH30 amp	
Build Quality	17/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	91%

Good for... everything from clean to thrash

Look elsewhere... more channels and digital effects or reverb

FACTFILE

ORANGE THUNDER 30

Specs: Twin-channel Class A amplifier with three stage (7W, 15W and 30W) switchable output levels and an FX loop. Two ECC83 preamp valves and four EL84 power valves

RRP: £537

Front panel: On/off switch, full/standby/half output switch, dirty/clean switch. Power light, Volume, Shape and Gain for Dirty channel. Treble, Bass and Volume for clean channel, input jack

Rear Panel: 2 or 4 output valve selector switch, three speaker output jacks (1 x 16 ohms and 2 x 8 ohms), channel changing footswitch input jack, FX Loop send and return jacks, fuse and power inlet

Dimensions: 550mm wide, 240mm deep, 240mm high

Weight: 15kg/33.1lbs

Contact: OMEC Ltd
020 8905 2828
www.orangeamps.com

Scan: worldmags® & Journal-Plaza®

FACTFILE

ORANGE PPC410 SPEAKER CABINET

Description: Closed-backed 16 ohms speaker extension cabinet with 120W RMS handling, 13-ply high density 18mm birch plywood build. 4x10" Celestion Vintage speakers

RRP: £439

Rear Panel: Twin amplifier jack inputs

Dimensions: 660mm wide, 700mm high, 300mm deep

Weight: 40kg/88.2lbs

Contact: OMEC Ltd
020 8905 2828
www.orangeamps.com

The dirty channel has Volume, Shape and Gain; the clean side has Treble, Bass and Volume

THE COMPETITION

MARSHALL
2245 JTM45 & 425B 4x12 cab

A recreation of one of Marshall's earliest amps, the JTM45 pumps 30W through a simple three-band EQ. Valves are two 5881s, three ECC83s and a GZ34 rectifier. The cab carries a quartet of 25W 12" Celestion Greenback speakers

RRP: £789 & £489

HIWATT
Custom 20 head & 4x12 cab

A 20W class A single-channel amp from another original UK manufacturer with EL84 and ECC83 valves, point-to-point wiring and a swanky 'special design tone network'. The 300W 4x12" cab is crafted from marine ply and comes with Fanes or Celestions

SRP: £1465 & £1065

BUDDA
Superdrive 45W head and 4x12 cab

This handwired US import is pricey, but it's got quality. Two KT66s with a selectable tube/solid state rectifier switch pump 45W through two channels with an FX loop. The cab is solid pine and comes with four Phat 12" speakers

PRICE: £1799 & £799

Here there's another chrome selector switch for choosing between two or four output valves; then there's a trio of speaker inputs - twin 8 ohm and a single 16 ohm which allow you to connect two 16 ohm cabs or a straight 16 ohm input for a lone cab. Next is a footswitch input and then the FX loop Return/Send ports.

The matching PPC410 (Power Projection Cabinet) promises tight yet roomy thump. It's built to a closed back design from 13-ply high-density 18mm birch plywood, covered in orange vinyl (naturally) and fitted with four 10" Celestion Vintage 30 speakers. We've looked at other PPC's before and this one is as solid and well made as we now expect. There are plenty of cabs on the market, of course, and you may have your own preferred speaker combination, but a 4x10" rated at 120W (at 16 ohms) makes sense with this 30-watter.

SOUNDS

The clean sounds here are just that: sparkly and chiming with a Strat bridge pickup and with tons of headroom in full power mode. Without reverb the clean tone may be a little too 'dry' for some, but in a gigging environment this really shouldn't be an issue. Flicking down the output scale squishes the tone down to more manageable and neighbourly levels without losing any of the quality. The deceptively simple two-band EQ also covers a lot of ground, allowing you tame a spiky bridge pickup or dial out the flab inherent in some neck humbuckers. There is of course a sweet spot which I found very quickly when swapping between a worn Strat and a late '60s SG, and you'll find it for your own instruments too.

The Shape dial twists the tone from jangly indie rock to classic crunchy humbucker blues to face-melting thrash

A clunky upward flick on the selector switch engages the Dirty channel. We were particularly excited to test this setting as Orange promise a huge wad of gain - and my, does it deliver. The volume and gain controls do exactly what you'd expect (again, tameable downward from 30W through 15W to 7W) but it's the inoffensively-named 'Shape' knob that really earns its spurs here and lifts the whole amp up onto a different level of broad and usable sonic territory.

Much more than just a simple mid-range boost/cut, the Shape dial twists and chews the tone to extraordinary degrees in the limited space of a 1 to 10 dial. There's oodles of volume and high level gain on tap anyway, and it's helped to breathe in 30W full-output mode with the focussed but expansive 4x10" cab. So whether your music is jangly indie rock with an edge, classic crunchy nickel-covered humbucking overdriven blues or face-melting thrash, a twist of the Gain and a twirl of the Shape knob will get you there in moments. Splendid stuff.

VERDICT

If the Tiny and Dual Terror are babies, the Thunder TH30 is the daddy in Orange's 30W class A range. It dips a toe into higher gain territory - and it does it very well. The Shape EQ knob is also a fave around here, but on top of that they've cleverly balanced the gutsy rawness of the Dirty channel with a clean channel that anyone could happily gig or record with. The lack of reverb may be an issue for some, but if your set-list is reliant on a few more whistles, beeps and farts than a straight-ahead twin channel amp is suited to, then the quality valve-driven FX loop will allow you to squish in some modulation. You can then be confident of a smooth coating of gorgeous, warm valve tone on the way to the speakers and that is really what it's all about.

FINAL SCORE: PPC410 cab	
Build Quality	17/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	**87%**

Good for... quality stage projection
Look elsewhere... for cab with 4x12" speakers

Scan: worldmags® & JournalPlaza®

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Price: £399

Most budget valve amps give about 15W of power. These new Jet Citys give 20W – and there's also a world-famous amplifier designer behind them. Review by Huw Price

Jet City

JCA2112RC combo & JCA20H head & cab

FACTFILE

JCA2112RC COMBO

Specs: 1 channel 1 x 12" combo with Eminence speaker & spring reverb. Made in China

Power output: 20 Watts

Tube Complement: 5 x 12AX7s, 2 x EL84s

Controls: Gain, Reverb, Bass, Middle, Treble, Master Volume, Presence

Price: £399

Mike Soldano's name has been legendary since the 1980s, and Soldano amps have been used by Eric Clapton, Mark Knopfler, Peter Frampton and many other top players. Mike has also sidelined as a hired gun, helping to design amps for makers such as Yamaha. When Jet City asked Soldano to design a 20W head/cab and combo, he actually ended up becoming a partner.

Controls comprise Gain, Reverb (on the combo only), Bass, Middle, Treble, Volume, Master and Presence, and these amps are very simple to operate. The preamp/reverb tubes are 12AX7s, and a pair of EL84s deliver the power. All the components and valve sockets are PCB-mounted and each plywood cabinet houses a 12" 16 Ohm Eminence speaker. Two additional speaker outputs are labelled 8 Ohms and 16 Ohms.

The combo is light enough to be carried with one hand, but when it's split into separate head and cab form it's even easier. The handle and corner protectors look a bit cheap but otherwise the standard of build is extremely impressive.

One channel, simple controls – but the EQ is deceptively powerful

The combo has a diffused tone and is sweeter, warmer and more complex. It's the one for soft rock, blues and roots

SOUNDS

These two rigs appear to be virtually identical, besides the fact that one is an open-backed combo and the other comprises a separate head and closed-back cabinet. There's the reverb circuit on the combo to throw into the equation too, so before getting into the nitty gritty tone talk our first duty is to determine whether these features affect the sound.

We placed both rigs side by side, set the controls identically (zeroing the reverb on the combo, of course) and fed a Les Paul through an A/B switchbox. The differences were subtle but easy to discern. The head and cab had a punchier, drier and more direct tone with a touch more pick articulation and brightness. It was also louder and the bass end was tighter and more sharply focused, so on the whole it should suit hard rockers

FINAL SCORE: JCA2112RC combo	
Build Quality	16/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	19/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	87%

Good for... clean, overdrive, modern crunch

Look elsewhere... lush reverb, tight low end, channel switching, effects loop, onboard effects

Scan: worldmags® & Journal-Plaza®

Price: £319 & £189

FACTFILE

JCA20H HEAD & JCA12S CABINET

Specs: Single channel head with 1x12" closed back cabinet and Eminence speaker. Made in China

Power output: 20W

Tube Complement: three 12AX7s, two EL84s

Controls: Gain, Reverb, Bass, Middle, Treble, Master Volume, Presence

Price: £319 (head), £189 (cab)

Contact:
Source Distribution
020 8962 5080
www.jetcityamplification.com

The head and cab is punchy, dry and direct. It's louder with a more focussed bass, so it should suit hard rockers best

An all-valve 1x12" mini-rig for under £500: it's a bargain

best of all. The combo had a softer, more diffused tone that allowed the woodier tones of the LP to come through. The sound seemed to radiate from around the amp rather than emanate from a fixed point and the overall sensation was sweeter, warmer and more complex. So this is probably the best setup for softer rock, blues and rootsy styles.

To figure out if these differences were the result of the circuitry or cabinet design, we routed the output of the combo into an A/B box and then to both the combo cab and the extension. The sonic differences remained as we switched from cab to cab, so we can conclude that the amps are essentially the same, and we can now sit down to investigate the range of tones collectively rather than individually.

Even without channel-switching or fancy push/pull knobs these amps are remarkably versatile. This is due to the effective range of the controls, their voicing and the way they respond.

But can a famous high-gain name like Soldano coupled with the relatively meager 20W deliver loud cleans? They certainly can. On maxing the Master and adjusting the overall volume using Gain some overdrive from the power amp is noticeable, so the solution is actually to drop Master back while increasing Gain. The nature of the clean tones depends on the way you balance up Treble and Presence. The Presence control is impressive in the way it enhances detail, articulation and snappiness. Blackface tones are possible, especially on the combo where you can add reverb. Turning up Gain while backing off the Treble morphs the tone into tweedy territory.

The Gain control responds evenly and smoothly. It's easy to dial in exactly the right amount of overdrive and sustain, and the front end is equally happy with high output humbuckers and traditional T-types. Once you start exploring the dirtier areas of the Jet City the EQ becomes pivotal. Brutal quantities of overdrive are available, and the treble character does change as you increase Gain. For classic British tones, Gain at 5 or 6 is about right and Middle needs to be fairly high up. Once again the Treble and Presence controls interact for setting the balance between chime and bite, plus taming the top end if needed.

As Gain enters the final third of its range the smoothness remains but the midrange can get a bit flubby and overcooked. The resulting reduction in clarity is easily remedied by backing off Middle to provide the requisite amount of scoop. Once again Presence is pivotal, especially where hot humbuckers are involved.

VERDICT

Jet City's UK distributor has been taking these amps to various retailers, demonstrating them, and then asking the retailers to guess the price. Apparently everybody assumes they're way more expensive than they really are, and I would have made the same mistake.

First, some minor negatives: both amps are a little noisy and they don't quite have the composure of the best high-gain amps when pushed to their limits... but then we're trying to force crazy crunch tones through a 20W power stage at full strap. Also, the combo's small reverb tank provides subtle spatial enhancement rather than dripping wet surf, blues and rockabilly sounds.

The positives? There's no hunting for a sweet spot - it's easy to dial in the tone you need. These amps bring out the voice of every guitar, and you can dial up any tone you might need from snappy country to smooth, sustaining fusion-type lead tones and raw contemporary rock.

Some all-valve amps at this price feature channel switching, effects loops and speaker simulated outputs, but the Jet City stakes its claim on tone quality and 5W more power than most of the competition. Frankly you have to wonder what the future holds for digital modelling amps when you can buy valve guitar amps that are as loud, versatile and toneful as these for less than £400.

FINAL SCORE: JCA20H head	
Build Quality	16/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	19/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	88%

Good for... clean, overdrive, modern crunch

Look elsewhere... reverb, channel switching, speaker emulation, effects loop, digital effects

THE COMPETITION

VHT
Lead 20 AV-GT1-20

20W valve combo, two channels, AXL reverb, four 12AX7s, two EL84s, 12" Celestion G12H30, Clean Volume, Gain, overdrive Level, Reverb, Master Volume, 8 ohm and 16 ohm speaker outputs

RRP: £408

FENDER
Blues Junior III

Well-respected 15W tube combo with three 12AX7s, two EL84s and 12" Fender Lightning Bolt by Eminence. One channel, controls for Volume, Reverb, Master, Middle, Bass, Treble and Fat Switch. External speaker out

RRP: £437

BLACKSTAR
HT Studio 20 Head & HTV112 1x12" Cabinet

All-valve 20W head with two EL34s and two ECC83s. Two channels, three-band EQ, Enhanced Tone Control, ISF Infinite Shape Feature, Master Volume, Digital Reverb, Effect Loop, speaker-emulated output, speaker out 16 & 8 Ohm. HTV112 1x12" cab with Celestion driver

RRP: £379 & £159

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First Impressions

Affordable amps in both little and large guises

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Price: £59

In the '60s and '70s Kustoms were used by the stars of rock'n'roll and psychedelia. Now here's a teeny practice amp and an effects-laden 2x12" combo. Review by Dave Walsh

Kustom

Kustom KG1 & KG212FX

Under the sometimes questionable guidance of entrepreneur Bud Ross, US-built Kustom amps first caught the public attention in the mid-'60s. With their funky, original designs, solid state power and plush faux-leather coverings based on the sparkling interiors of the hot rods he so loved, the amps gained a loyal following and some high-profile users. Sadly, Ross was a loose cannon and a big gambler, eventually losing the company - or so legend has it, at least - in a poker game.

More recently a reformed Kustom, now based in Kentucky, has introduced valves into some of their higher end lines as they look to compete with the bigger boys in the amp world. Here, we take a look at two solid state entry-level models - designed in the US, built in China.

A six-inch speaker isn't much - but then the classic Fender Champ did pretty well with just that

KG1

A combo of Lilliputian proportions with a six-inch speaker and one channel, the KG1 is aimed directly at beginners or bedroom level practice. A single input, Gain, Tone and Master Volume controls are augmented by a very handy Aux In for MP3 backing tracks and a headphone jack for late nights or private strumming. Not a bad line-up of features for a paltry outlay, but it has one other trick up its tiny sleeve in the shape of the Tone knob. Traditionally the tone control on a simple practice amp is there to wind off spiky treble from your guitar output, but here it actually works in an entirely different manner. Rolling the control clockwise gradually beefs up the midrange for classic rock, while backing it off it sucks away the mids and boosts the bass and treble frequencies for tighter clean tones or a browner American high-gain voice.

A combo of Lilliputian proportions, the Kustom KG1 is aimed directly at beginners or bedroom level practice

SOUNDS

Hooking up a nice maple-necked Strat with good vintage-voiced single-coils, a deft click of the attractive blue LED

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	16/20
Playability	17/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	17/20
TOTAL	**85%**

Good for... beginners and bedroom action

Look elsewhere... for more power and grunt as well as reverb

FACTFILE

KG1

Description: 10W solid-state combo amplifier. Open back design cab with a single six-inch speaker

RRP: £59

Control panel: Input jack, Gain switch, Gain, Tone and Volume rotary controls, Aux in and Headphone mini-jacks, Power on/off switch

Rear Panel: Fuse and power inlet

Dimensions: 275mm wide, 275mm high, 175mm deep

Weight: 3.7kg/8.2lbs

THE COMPETITION

VOX
Pathfinder 15/R

Traditional Vox looks with a solid state power plant and an 8" Vox Bulldog. Reverb and tremolo plus a gain boost switch and an external speaker output

RRP: £99.00

EPIPHONE
Valve Junior

Just 5W of single-ended Class A valve loveliness clad in a simplistic retro one-knob package with an 8" speaker

RRP: £139

LANEY:
Cub 10

10W single channel, all-valve class A/B combo with open-backed cab. Two ECC83s and two 6v6GT valves with 10" Celestion Tube 10 speaker. Hi & Lo inputs, external speaker jack

RRP: £219

Scan: worldmags® & Journal-Plaza®

Price: £199

FACTFILE

KG212FX

Description: 30W solid-state closed-backed combo with onboard digital effects and two 12" Kustom speakers

RRP: £199

Control panel: Input 1 and 2 sockets, lead channel Gain and Volume, channel selector button, Rhythm channel Volume, Bass, Middle and Treble rotary controls, Reverb/delay selector button, Effects selection Rotary, Chorus On button, Aux In and Headphone mini jacks

Rear Panel: Power inlet, fuse, external speaker jack, effects loop send/return and footswitch input

Dimensions: 666mm wide, 495mm high, 235mm deep

Weight: 15.1kg/33.3lbs

Contact: JHS
01132 865381
www.jhs.co.uk

THE COMPETITION

FENDER
FM212 DSP

100W 2x12" solid-state combo with amp modelling technology plus digital effects including chorus, delay and vibratone

RRP: £339.99

VOX
VT100

100W 2x12" combo with Vox speakers. Modelling features include 22 amps and 11 effects plus separate reverb and 66 footswitchable preset programs

RRP: £489

LINE 6
Spider Valve MkII 2x12

40W Class AB valve amp with two 12AX7s and two 6L6 power valves. 2x12" Celestion Vintage 30s, 16 amp models and 36 user channels, all the usual FX and POD XLR direct out

RRP: £734

power button brings the KG1 to life. The diminutive stature and six-inch speaker produce the exact tightly focussed output we would expect for a £50 solid state amp. The clean settings (without gain) are easily shaped, and the 'active' tone sweeping knob can sweeten flabbier humbuckers or beef up the low end on tired single coils. Engaging the Gain control brings a raspy, brittle overdriven sound to the fingertips. The tone shaping knob does a great job here in approximating a melting metal sound or punchier Brit classic rock tones. It's a boxy sound, but the lo-fi quality is great for jamming along to backing tracks, or - if you're into recording layered or double-tracked guitar parts - it could be just the tonic to harden the edges of over-polished, reverby or effects-laden tracks.

KG212FX

Still in the KG product range, this twin speaker combo is a leap up the ladder in terms of both output and appointments - but, remarkably, it still falls within the sub-£200 bracket. First impressions of the open-backed cab with twin 12" speakers give a strong 'budget AC30' feel. But there the similarity ends: with solid-state innards and onboard effects, the KG212FX sits firmly in the small gig or beginner market.

The build is efficiently executed for the outlay - some sloppy vinyl cover finishing on the inner walls notwithstanding - and although it has twin channels, there's no supplied footswitch and the three-band EQ is shared across both channels. However, the four selectable digital effects - Reverb, Delay, Chorus/Reverb or Chorus/Delay - add a dollop of gig usability. The Aux In and Headphone sockets, though, suggest more sedate bedroom usage.

SOUNDS

With the same maple fingerboard Strat plugged in, we dialled in a clean setting on the Rhythm channel and slipped in a dash of reverb. The result was a surprisingly elastic and twangy tone; there was evidence of a little rattle at higher volume as the amp headroom struggled to cope with a deep-sounding neck pickup and a dark EQ setting, but with very little knob twiddling we found a good, solid, sprightly clean sound which would cover most desired shimmery moments in the average set.

Kustom has aimed to cover a wide range of genres with this combo. There's a lot of gain available, and hopping across channels to a crunchy medium-gain setting is push-button simple. The Lead channel is loud... a touch square-sounding but with more than enough gain spare to go up a notch into pseudo scooped-metal territory.

Effects are global, which can be a drawback, and you can't adjust the delay tempo either

The Rhythm channel is solid and clean, the Lead channel is loud with enough gain to go into pseudo metal territory

The bad points? Sadly, the digital effects aren't assignable or programmable to each channel, so even if you get a sweet reverb, delay or modulation for a beautiful lyrical clean arpeggio passage nailed, then be prepared to be swamped by syrupy, swirling overdrive as you change channels: not ideal for gigs. There's no tempo adjustment for the delay/chorus, just a Level rotary which mixes the bare effect level into your tone. All in all, it's a bit of a lame duck unless you play just rockabilly with some slapback delay. In all fairness, the more experienced player will simply set a light reverb or delay and use it across both channels - perhaps manually engaging the heavier modulation before or during the song, and if your main need is home practice with a drop of recording now and again, then it's never going to be a huge issue.

VERDICT

It's difficult and almost unfair to criticise the performance of these amps when one takes the price into account. A quick squizz on t'internet will inform you that the KG1 already sells for a ready or two less than the RRP, so on that basis I wouldn't hesitate to grab one for practice. The tone-shaping control alone is worth the entry price, and if you fancy something just a little different and lo-fi for recording noodles, crank up and enjoy.

The KG212FX is aimed at a different tier of the market, perhaps, but it retains many similarities in terms of build quality. The core output tone is fine - a touch cardboardy perhaps - but in attempting to cover so much ground, tonally its reach exceeds its grasp. Also, an additional Tempo knob for the onboard effects would at least put it on an equal footing with its competitors. Oh, and how about an included footswitch, please?

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	16/20
Playability	16/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	**81%**

Good for... entry level gigging and recording
Look elsewhere... valves or assignable effects

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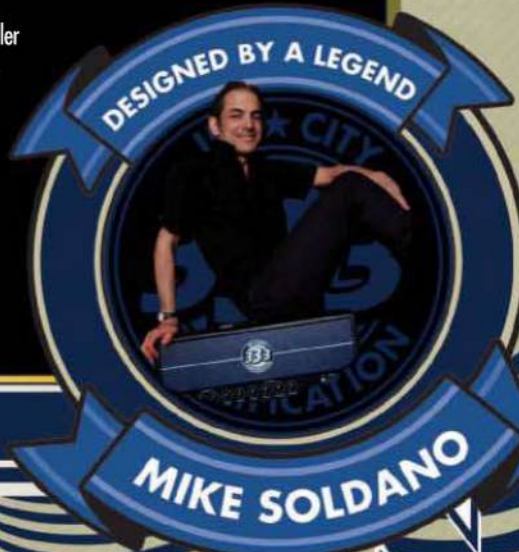

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Price: £165

Homebrew also makes delays, phasers and various psychedelic whoosh machines – but these two are all about different flavours of drive, drive and yet more drive. Review by Huw Price

Home Brew Electronics

Para Drive & Big D

The name Homebrew Electronics is aptly symbolic of the cottage industry ethos that still permeates parts of the current boutique pedal scene. Plenty of today's popular pedal builders certainly started off producing limited runs of handmade units from home, and some continue that way and gradually hike up their prices. Others, however, like HBE, take a more pragmatic approach when demand starts to outstrip supply.

Fortunately the quality doesn't seem to have fallen correspondingly. HBE's pedals are still made one at a time using chassis-mounted jacks, DC sockets and potentiometers, double-sided circuit boards and heavy gauge hook up wire. The enclosures are diecast metal and true bypass switching is standard. With a client list that includes Steve Lukather, Paul Gilbert, Joe Bonamassa, Neil Schon and Billy Gibbons, HBE must be doing something right.

PARA DRIVE

We're starting with the Para Drive because it's based on HBE's flagship pedal – the Power Screamer. As its name implies the JRC4558-loaded circuit is based on the evergreen Ibanez Tube Screamer, but of course the usual mods have been performed so it's true bypass and buffer-free. HBE has also expanded the concept by including a three-position Diode Select switch on the top panel for various overdrive voicings plus an FD switch for a fatter low end. The Para Drive's most distinctive feature, though, is a fully independent and adjustable clean boost mode.

The Para Drive is based on the evergreen TS but has a Diode Select and an adjustable clean boost

The kingfisher blue metallic finish and the white printed lettering look groovy and the contrasting blue chickenhead knob for the boost level helps to differentiate the two sides of the pedal. As you might expect, the controls are limited to Gain, Tone and Level.

SOUNDS

If you like that classic Tube Screamer midrange hump, the Para Drive won't disappoint. There's definitely more gain on tap, mind, and perhaps a bit more fatness – even with FD disengaged. To my ears the Para Drive most closely resembles a TS with the Diode switch set to the left position. Having said that, all three diode settings are variations on the same theme and they're less noticeable when Gain is set low. The right position is slightly grittier and fatter than the left setting, and it works particularly well with single coils.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	17/20
Vibe	19/20
TOTAL	**91%**

Good for... trad and modded TS tones with enhanced clarity, functionality and dynamics

Look elsewhere... for ultra-transparent, tonally neutral overdrive

FACTFILE

PARA DRIVE

Specs: Overdrive/boost pedal, PP3 battery or 9v supply, made in the USA

Controls: Gain, Tone & Level with Boost, three-position Diode Select switch, FD fat switch and true bypass footswitch

Price: £165

THE COMPETITION

T-REX
Møller

A great-sounding overdrive with an independent adjustable clean boost section and a clean/overdrive mixer control based on a modded TS circuit

RRP: £169

BEN ROD
Classic Screamer

Another fine sounding true bypass and bufferless TS clone – but it doesn't come with a boost function

RRP: 140 €uros

Scan: worldmags® & Journal-Plaza®

Price: £169

FACTFILE

BIG D

Specs: Overdrive/boost pedal, PP3 battery or 9v supply. Made in the USA

Controls: Gain, Tone, Level, Bigger with, five-position Diode Select switch, Hard/Soft clip switch, true bypass & Bigger footswitches

Price: £169

Contact:
Vintage & Rare Guitars
020 7240 7500
www.homebrewelectronics.com

THE COMPETITION

SEYMOUR DUNCAN
Tweak Fuzz

A versatile fuzz pedal with a six-way tone selector switch for raspy lo-fi fun, but it doesn't do the backed-off Hendrixy stuff too well

RRP: £99

BARBER
Trifecta

Creamy vintage-style fuzz with a three-way voicing switch from another pedal maker who's gone from small things to big-time

RRP: £149.95

Although I'm fairly partial to Tubescreamer tones, the boxy honk of the midrange can become tedious and even with the tone wound up it always seems like a blanket has been thrown over the amp. So for me the middle setting is the winner, because it opens the tone of the Para Drive right up. The frequency spread is wider and there's way more clarity.

The FD switch is also very effective. Rather than providing a bass boost, it appears to lower the preset high pass filter cutoff point. If you're using a small combo it allows all the low frequencies through, and if you're playing through a more bassy amp or a closed back cabinet you can use it to keep the low end tight when the Para Drive is activated.

Since the boost function is independent of the overdrive, both can be activated individually as well as simultaneously. The boost appears to be pre-overdrive so the gain level increases when both are activated. This works just fine if you need a touch more sustain and bite for soloing, but if the Gain control is already set high before the boost is applied, things can sound a bit overcooked.

The solution is simple: just set lower Gain levels for power chords or riffing duties, then exploit the extra overdrive that comes from the Boost. Alternatively you can use the Para Drive as a dual-function pedal by getting your meat and potatoes overdrive from your amp then adding more gain from the TS side of the Para Drive or pushing the amp further into overdrive harder using the boost.

The HBE Big D is an amazingly versatile OD, distortion and fuzz that puts you in the driving seat

BIG D

One look at the control knob and switch layout is enough to tell you that this pedal is no regular distortion pedal. Of course you get Gain, Tone and Level – and as you might expect, Gain sets the amount of overdrive, and Level varies the amount of output. Beware of the Tone control, though – it operates backwards. Turning it clockwise reduces treble and increases the bass response. The Bigger function is a footswitch-operated variable boost stage with a footswitch and a dedicated Level control knob. The second footswitch provides true bypass On/Off.

Pretty much every overdrive and distortion stompbox ever made uses germanium or silicon diodes in various symmetrical or asymmetrical combinations to achieve signal clipping. Rather than tying you down to a single arrangement, the HBE Big D has a five-way Diode select switch right in the centre of the box to let you pick the best combination for any given application.

And there's more, too – a Clip toggle switch that changes the dynamic response of clipping section. Hard provides increased output with reduced clipping and Soft has less output with more clipping. This switch doesn't work with Diode settings 4 and 5.

SOUNDS

This pedal can certainly do overdrive as well as distortion, but it's a wilder ride than the Para Drive. The more even frequency response also means it's more transparent, so the Tone control can be used to sweeten and fine-tune the treble.

As you move through the diode settings the first three gradually become more distorted and fatter. The fourth setting reminds me of the Para Drive's centre setting because the sound opens right up and really starts to breathe... but at high gain levels you might need to tame the treble a bit. Position 5 is completely different because it falls somewhere between a very good clear distortion tone and the clarinet-like tones of a vintage fuzz. Output is lower, but things really start to sing when you crank up the level.

The Clip switch helps to fine-tune the distortion tones, but it also changes the response by smoothing the dynamics. As for the Bigger feature, it shouldn't be mistaken for a boost function: once activated the Bigger control gradually beefs up the lows and low mids. While this provides yet more effective tone-shaping, there's hardly any corresponding increase in output level.

VERDICT

The Para Drive produces a harmonically rich and smooth overdrive with a midrange bump that varies depending on the diode setting. It never gets harsh, it retains dynamic response over a very wide gain range, and it cleans up from the guitar without losing clarity.

The Big D is an amazingly versatile overdrive/distortion/fuzz that puts you firmly in the driving seat. Even at high gain settings it remains dynamically responsive, with no mush in the low end and plenty of note separation. Both these pedals are beautifully made and they're very classy performers.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	19/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	19/20
TOTAL	**93%**

Good for... a fabulous range of overdrive, distortion and fuzz tones

Look elsewhere... for a midrange scoop control

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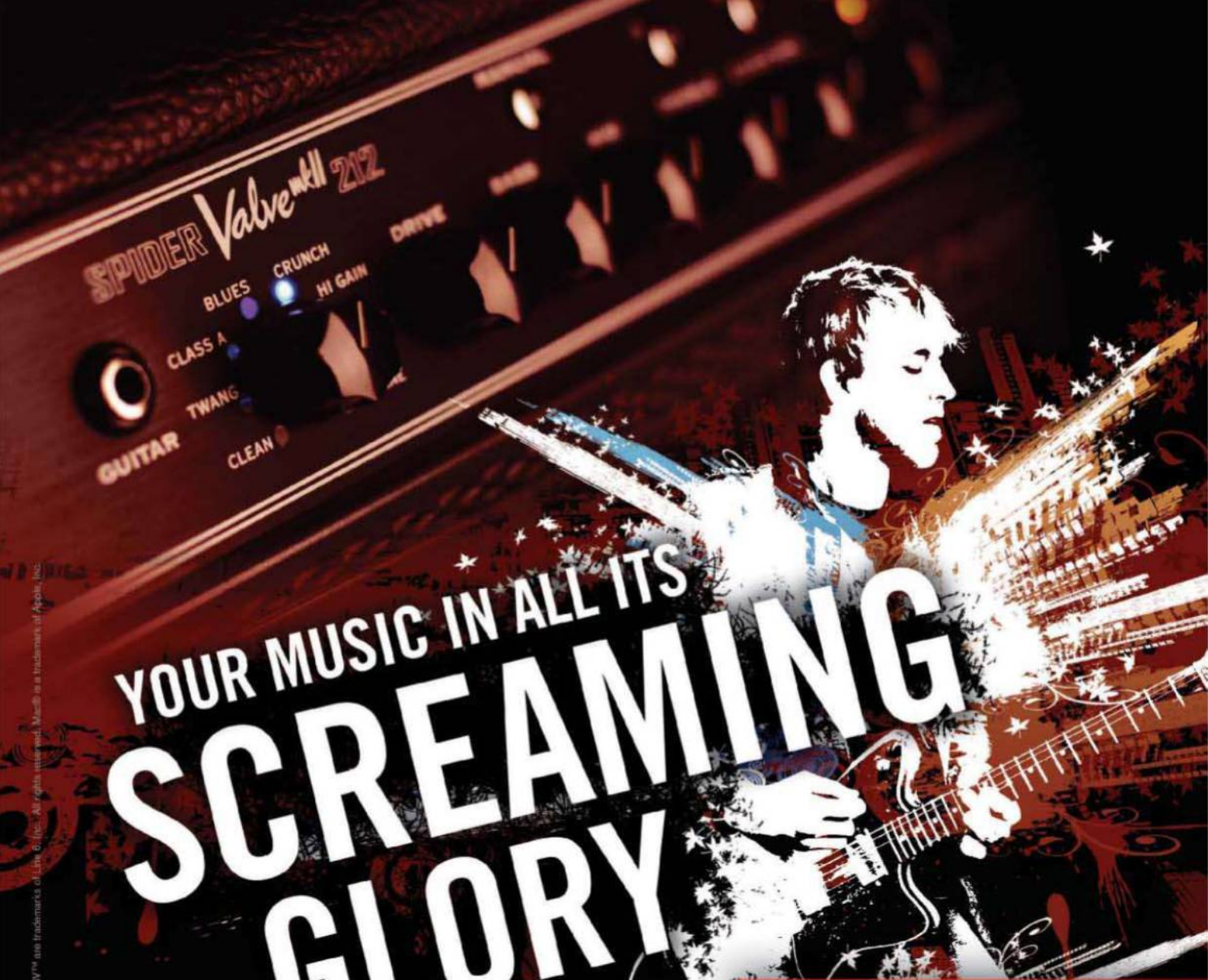

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Price: £878

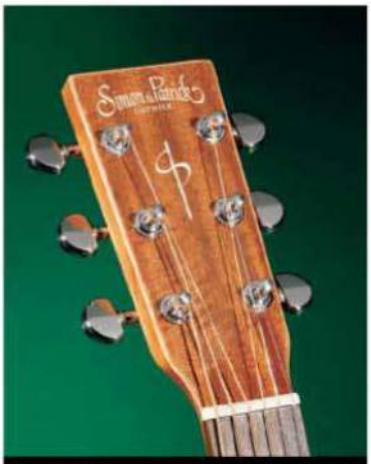
Built in Canada by Godin, Simon & Patrick guitars are moving up the ladder with a Woodland Pro line featuring solid timbers throughout. Review by Jerry Uwins

Simon & Patrick

Woodland Pro Folk & Parlour

Over recent years the Godin-made Simon & Patricks have thankfully moved away from sometimes impenetrable catalogue designations to series with actual names, such as the Woodlands. In standard guise these have solid tops with laminated backs and sides, but a new Woodland Pro line-up has just been added, offering all-solid spruce and mahogany construction. In addition to our Folk and Parlour, the series includes a dreadnought and mini jumbo, all offered in acoustic and electro versions. The parlour on test is one of the latter.

The solid-wood-centered soundhole rosette is one of the new cosmetic upgrades given to the Pro series



Where the regular Woodland Folk has a black headstock, this one's got a matching mahogany facing veneer

FOLK

Rather than echo Martin-like 000 styling, this folk has a body profile reminiscent of a classical guitar, both in overall size and rim depth: it measures 103mm across the baseblock. Apart from its solid mahogany back and sides, two main things visually differentiate the instrument from non-Pro Woodlands. First, the multi-ring soundhole rosette has a central inlay of a single wood rather than a light/dark mosaic pattern; second, the body carries a high-gloss lacquer, not the others' low-gloss polished finish.

Adornments elsewhere are simple but tasteful. The back is divided by a centre strip of maple and mahogany; binding is brown plastic, accompanied around the top by coachlined cream purfling. The headstock is given a mahogany/maple overlay veneer, chamfered around the perimeter to reveal a maple edging from front-on. Everything is neatly detailed, and the quality of timbers and finishing looks very good. On a practical point, the bridge has angled slots in front of the pins, ensuring a decent break-angle for the strings whatever the action.

The new Woodland Pro guitars offer all-solid spruce and mahogany construction and come in acoustic or electro versions

Employing S&P's usual bolt-on system, the mahogany neck is three-piece with scarfed peghead and separate heel portion, fashioned to a medium span starting off at 43.5mm across the nut. The profile is a fairly flat 'C', quite

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	15/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	13/20
TOTAL	80%

Good for... reliable, unfussy folk-sized playability and handling

Look elsewhere... for slightly more punch and a greater sense of dynamics

FACTFILE

WOODLAND PRO FOLK

Description: Folk-size acoustic. Made in Canada

Price: £878

Build: Solid spruce top, mahogany back, sides and neck, 21-fret rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, Tusq nut/saddle, chrome tuners, strap button

Options: Cutaway electro with B-Band A3T (£1032). Also Dreadnought (£775 acoustic, £929 cutaway electro) and Mini Jumbo (£878, or £1032 cutaway electro). Case £99

Left-handers: No

Finish: Gloss body, satin neck

Scale length: 632mm/24.9"

Neck width:
Nut 43.5mm
12th fret 54mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
9th fret 23mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 54.5mm

Action as supplied:
2.0/2.5mm at 12th fret

Max rim depth: 103mm

Max body width: 376mm

Fingerboard radius: 16"

Weight: 1.95kg/4.3lb

THE COMPETITION

SEAGULL
Maritime SWS Folk

From the Godin stable; similar build and styling to Woodland Pro but tapered headstock

RRP: £916

MARINER
ESO E-6AR

Spruce/rosewood auditorium with maple/abalone binding and distinctive scooped peghead

RRP: £795

STONEBRIDGE
OM-22CM

Czech-made OM in cedar/mahogany with ebony fingerboard and bridge

RRP: £1085

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Price: £1032

FACTFILE

WOODLAND PRO PARLOUR

Description: 12-fret parlour electro-acoustic. Made in Canada

Price: £1032

Build: Materials as per Folk; 19-fret unbound fingerboard. Plus undersaddle pickup; B-Band A3T preamp with Volume, Bass, Middle, Treble, Presence and an auto-chromatic tuner

Options: Acoustic version (£878). Also see Folk

Left-handers: No

Finish: Gloss natural body, satin neck

Scale length: 632mm

Neck width:
Nut 43.5mm
12th fret 53.5mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 21mm
8th fret 24.5mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 54.5mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2.2mm

Max rim depth: 103mm

Max body width: 330mm

Fingerboard radius: 16"

Weight: 1.82kg/4.0lb

Contact: EMD
01293 862612
www.emdmusic.com

THE COMPETITION

TAKAMINE
EF407

Compact 'New Yorker' styling in all-laminated koa, with slot headstock. Three-band CT4B preamp includes tuner

RRP: £878

TANGLEWOOD
TW73 PRO SPEC B

Slot-head 12-fretter in cedar/mahogany with solid top and back with a wider neck than standard parlour model. B-Band A3T provides power

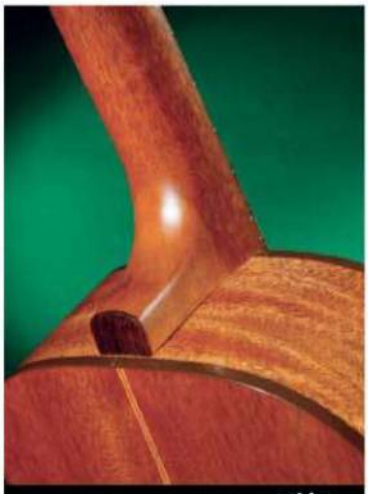
RRP: £629

BLUERIDGE
BR341

Pre-War Series wide-neck 12-fret parlour in all-solid spruce/mahogany. Priced with case but allow extra for electro system

RRP: from £699

The B-Band's woody-looking panel contains a four-band EQ plus a convenient onboard tuner



A square heel is a typical S&P thing. Brown binding keeps the looks understated and nicely downhome

The sound is earthy, boxy and typically parlour, but firing up the B-Band system reveals much more grown-up potential

shallow under low positions and still comfortably moderate further up. The satin finish is slick to the touch thanks to being grain-filled.

Fretting along the unbound rosewood fingerboard is well fitted even if the ends, though not sharp as such, do feel a bit nibby. A string spacing at the bridge of nigh-on 55mm contributes to decent all-round playability.

SOUNDS

As is often the case with all-solid-wood acoustics, the guitar has noticeably opened up after some playing in. It's still not the most far-projecting folk-sized guitar you'll come across, but the sound is reasonably dynamic, with a pleasingly warm tone in the lower registers that sits well against a high end that's clear without being too bright. The result is a nicely balanced delivery, whether picking or strumming.

PARLOUR

Unlike the other Woodland Pro electro variants, which are cutaways, our Parlour is a non-cutaway - not a surprising decision given the small, narrow-shouldered, 13"-wide body. Despite the compact profile, however, the maximum rim depth is relatively generous: the same, in fact, as the Folk's.

As opposed to that model's 14-fret neck, the Parlour is 12 frets to the body, which is not an uncommon layout for this genre. In this retro context, it could be argued that open-backed tuners would be more in character - but the enclosed diecast machines fitted carry mini buttons that look physically well balanced, as does the spade-shaped headstock, which is smaller than that of the other guitar.

In all other respects the Parlour's materials and trim are identical to the Folk's, and again it's a tidy build. In span and string spacing the neck is pretty much an exact match, though the profile has subtly more of a 'D' to it, and it's a millimetre or so deeper towards the heel turn, giving a more vintage-like feel but maintaining an easy grip. Due to less grain filling, the neck's satin finish isn't quite as smooth, but it's still a fast player.

SOUNDS

Acoustically, this is a parlour that sounds, well, like a typical parlour: quite earthy and a touch thin in timbre with a hint of middly boxiness and a low end that, given the fairly deep soundbox, frankly ought to be a little more forthcoming. That said, it's an enjoyable performer within its own down-home, bluesy confines.

Firing up the guitar's B-Band tuner-loaded A3T system reveals much more grown-up potential. Now we find an instrument that isn't cowed by bigger-bodied electros, with a range of EQ on the four-band preamp accessing a versatile palette of mainly good-quality sounds. One caution? Go easy on the treble and presence controls, since boosted settings - on our sample at least - veer towards the harshly strident rather than the sympathetically sparkling.

VERDICT

A bit more acoustic bottle from the Parlour wouldn't go amiss, but its competent electro capability is a plus point. The Folk, meanwhile, though not earth-shattering in any single respect, is nevertheless a dependable, likeable player - an easy guitar to live with.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	15/20
Value for money	15/20
Vibe	14/20
TOTAL	**80%**

Good for... taking a parlour into proficient powered realms

Look elsewhere... more up-front acoustic sound; smoother high-end EQ

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Portable, pure valve, studio quality tone is what the brand new Haze Series is all about. Loaded with natural valve tone, integrated effects and intuitive footswitching technology, the UK developed and engineered Haze Series takes your studio sound out on the road. Comprising the two channel Haze40 and Haze15, the series offers a rugged, gig-ready 40 Watt combo and a peerless 15 Watt head respectively. Combined with MHZ112A and MHZ112B speaker cabs, the Haze15 becomes the epitome of guitar amplification – a valve-driven Marshall stack, but one that fits easily into either the lounge or boot of the car.

To find out more about the **Haze Series** contact:
Marshall Amplification plc Denbigh Road, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK1 1DQ or visit the official Marshall website: www.marshallamps.com

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AMPLIFICATION

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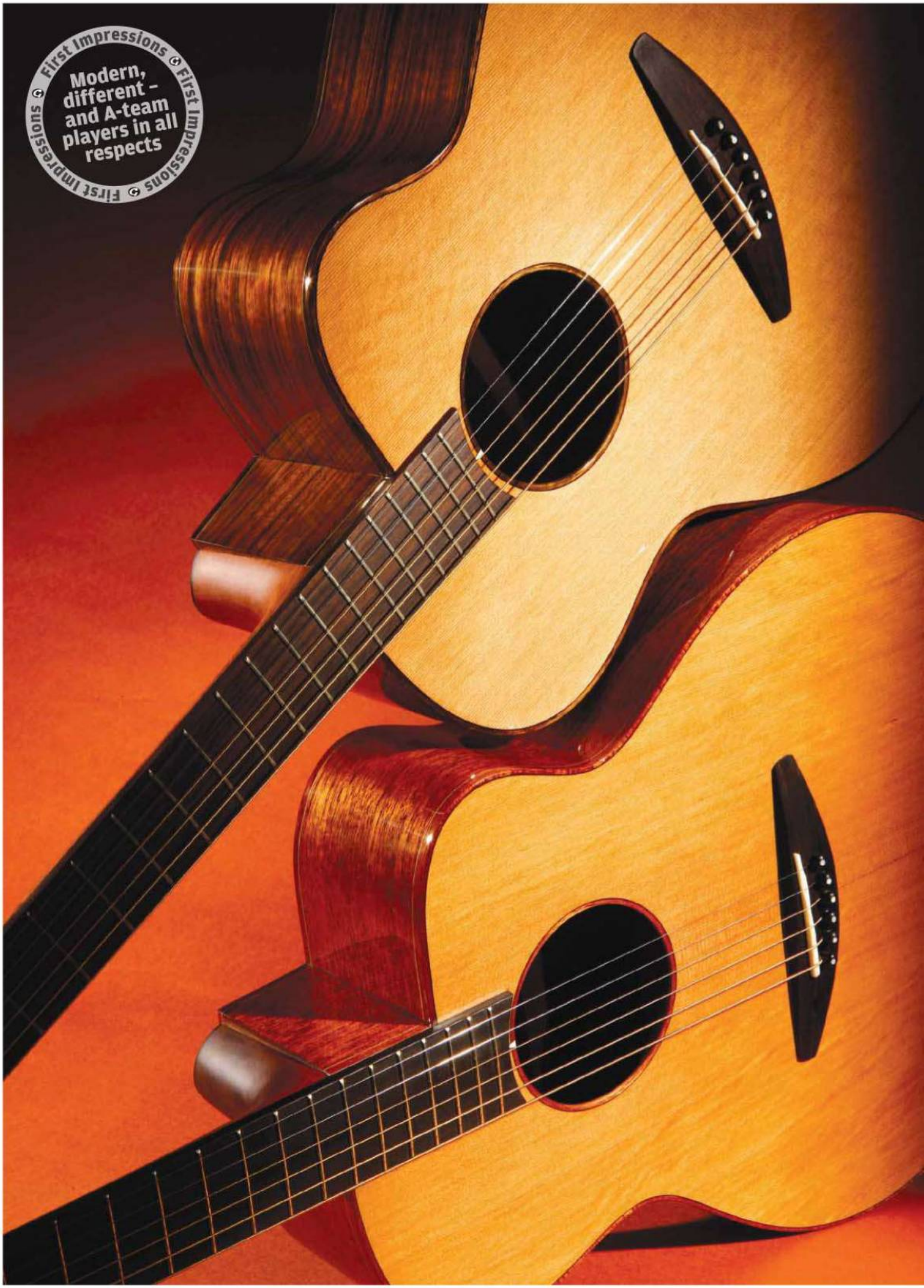

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Price: £759

Baden is adding two alternative timbers to its forward-looking A-Style range: handsome ovangkol, laminated for affordability, and mahogany-like kanzo. Review by Jerry Uwins

Baden

Ovangkol & Kanzo A-Style Acoustics

When former Taylor vice-president TJ Baden launched his innovative A-Style back in 2008, the guitar was offered with either mahogany, rosewood or maple backs and sides. These three options, plus the later addition of koa, are still in the range, but now they've been joined by ovangkol and kanzo. The ovangkol is laminated – unlike the other models which are all-solid timbers – enabling a keener entry price for the range.

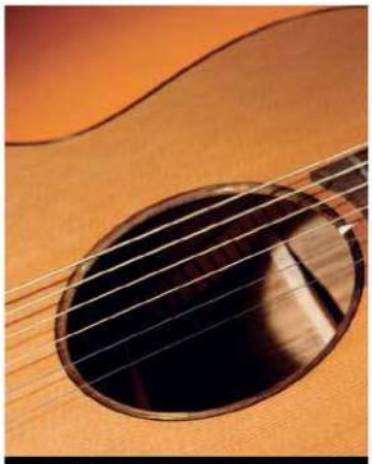
A-STYLE OVANGKOL

It's appropriate to describe the A-Style as 'innovative' since the instrument offers cutaway access on a design that, conventionally speaking, isn't a cutaway. It's as if the treble-side upper bout has been dropped down from the neck join, and internal inspection reveals that the rim and linings on that side continue across the face of the neckblock, rather than simply butting up to it as would be standard procedure. The effect is not only practical, but elegant.

A-Style may be a convenient means of distinguishing it from Baden's other design – the D-Style dreadnought – but it's larger than most people's idea of an auditorium. With a body span not far short of 16" and a capacious 120mm maximum rim depth, it could justifiably be called a mini- or small-jumbo: take your pick on the nomenclature. The top is gorgeously even-grained, warm-hued solid cedar, while the ovangkol back and sides have that typically stripey, contrasty grain – not so dissimilar to rosewood but lighter, almost golden brown, in overall colour. The beautifully buffed gloss lacquer throws the timbers into fine relief, as do the matching ovangkol soundhole ring and coachlined binding. The soundhole's triangular keystone motif is part of the Baden brand identity.

Unlike on Baden's electro variants which carry two strap buttons, the acoustics don't even have an end one.

The mahogany neck has a 25.35" scale and it's a touch slimmer and speedier than on the earliest models



Baden's clever, modernistic design includes a wood-edged soundhole with a neat little triangular insert

The top is gorgeously even-grained solid cedar, while the ovangkol back and sides have that typically stripey grain

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	20/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	19/20
Value for money	19/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	**95%**

Good for... combining design innovation with great sounds and playing panache

Look elsewhere... more traditional cutaway auditorium/mini-jumbo; fitted strap button

FACTFILE

A-STYLE OVANGKOL

Description: Cutaway auditorium-style acoustic. Made in Vietnam

Price: £759 inc. case

Build: Solid cedar top, laminated ovangkol back and sides. Mahogany neck with 20-fret bound rosewood fingerboard. Rosewood bridge, bone nut and saddle, chrome diecast tuners, no strap button

Options: Electros with either Fishman Matrix Infinity (£909) or Ellipse Aura (£1109). A-Styles also available with mahogany satin, mahogany gloss, rosewood, maple or koa back and sides – all solid wood. Prices on request

Left-handers: To special order, no extra cost

Finish: Gloss natural body, satin neck

Scale length: 644mm/25.35"

Neck width:
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 22mm
9th fret 23mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 55mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm

Max rim depth: 120mm

Max body width: 401mm

Fingerboard radius: 15"

Weight: 1.95kg/4.3lb

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Price: £1049

FACTFILE

A-STYLE KANZO

Description: Cutaway auditorium-style acoustic. Made in Vietnam

Price: £1049 inc. case

Build: Solid cedar top, solid kanzo back and sides. Mahogany neck with 20-fret bound ebony fingerboard. Ebony bridge, bone nut and saddle, chrome diecast tuners, no strap button

Options: Electros with either Fishman Matrix Infinity (£1199) or Ellipse Aura (£1399). Also see A-Style Ovangkol

Left-handers: To special order, no extra cost

Finish: Gloss natural body, satin neck

Scale length: 644mm/25.35"

Neck width:
Nut 43mm
12th fret 53mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 21.5mm
Ninth fret 23mm

String spacing:
Nut 36mm
Bridge 55mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 2.0mm
12th fret bass 2.3mm

Max rim depth: 120mm

Max body width: 401mm

Fingerboard radius: 15"

Weight: 2.16kg/4.75lb

Contact:
440 Distribution
0113 258 9599
www.badenguitars.com

THE COMPETITION

STONEBRIDGE
GA-22/CM/C

All-solid cedar/mahogany grand auditorium with a cutaway. Includes ebony fingerboard and bridge and a fingerstyle-width neck

RRP: £1135

TAKAMINE
TAN45C

'SuperNatural' mini-jumbo electro in cedar/rosewood with solid top and back. CoolTube preamp comes complete with tuner and semi-parametric midrange

RRP: £1195

LARRIVEE
L-03

Non-cutaway 16"-wide body of all-solid spruce/sapele. Features maple body binding and ivoroid-bound ebony fingerboard

RRP: £1022

The warm-coloured Cambodian kanzo back and sides look really fabulous under the thin gloss finish

This time the bridge – a stylish smile design – is ebony to complement the upgraded fingerboard and headplate

The cutaway isn't conventional – it's as if the treble-side upper bout has been dropped down from the neck join

Though easy enough to fit later, one or two dealers have queried its absence, and future shipments should be arriving pre-drilled for the UK distributor to install Taylor's nifty sleeved endpin accessory. The endpin acts as a conventional strap button, but on removal leaves a hole ready to accept a 13mm-diameter endpin socket (say from a Fishman Matrix Infinity) should you wish to retrofit an electro system at any stage.

As on all Badens the 644mm-scale satin-finish mahogany neck is a dovetail-jointed, one-piece affair, of mainstream span starting at 43mm across the nut and with fingerstyle-friendly 55mm string spacing at the bridge. The slick, moderate-depth 'C' profile feels instantly comfortable, and it seems that TJ has settled on slightly shallower dimensions here, because early Badens were a tad chunky further up. Fretting is immaculately fitted and dressed, and the rosewood fingerboard's binding reflects the maker's attention to fine detail.

At first glance, the fingerboard appears to employ pocketed frets – that is, where the tangs are cut short so as not to be seen along the edge. However, it transpires that binding is conventionally applied, but super-thin so it is effectively invisible. The fingerboard itself carries no front markers, but the important side dots are all there.

SOUNDS

This A-Style sounds as good as it looks – that is, fab. Volume, projection and dynamics are rich and readily forthcoming, with a bright, open tone that blends in a decent dollop of cedary low-end warmth. Add in a fast response and generous sustain, and playing the Baden is a delight.

A-STYLE KANZO

Stepping up to all-solid-wood territory, kanzo is a variant of mahogany native to Cambodia. It looks not unlike your average mahogany, but the grain is denser and more pronounced, and there's a distinctively flecked look to it. It also has something of a walnutty hue which altogether makes for a very attractive tonewood, especially on this A-Style where the coachlined body binding is again done in matching wood, with the grain seemingly turned round 90 degrees to lend a figured effect from face-on. The soundhole is likewise adorned, and the top – again cedar – is once more a fine-looking example.

In other constructional, trim and finishing respects, the A-Style Kanzo is largely a reprise of the Ovangkol, though in line with the higher price tag the fingerboard, bridge and headplate are this time made of ebony, not rosewood. The neck offers the same excellent grip as before, the only difference being a slightly shallower low-position profile.

SOUNDS

Dynamically, the heavier-on-the-scales Kanzo is a shade less resilient in terms of attack, but largely in compensation it seems to offer that little bit extra tonal maturity, with a creamier, slightly smoother bass response and a precisely balanced fluidity across the strings. It's not really better or worse, just subtly different and equally enjoyable.

VERDICT

Baden's A-Style design is unusual and, yes, a bit left-field, but to my mind it's got the lot (strap button presently excepted). An elegant, clean-lined aesthetic, painstaking build quality, fab sounds and obliging playability, and a definite I-want-one factor. Either of our two models will do very nicely, thanks.

FINAL SCORE	
Build Quality	20/20
Playability	19/20
Sound	18/20
Value for money	18/20
Vibe	18/20
TOTAL	**93%**
Good for...	as A-Style Ovangkol
Look elsewhere...	as A-Style Ovangkol

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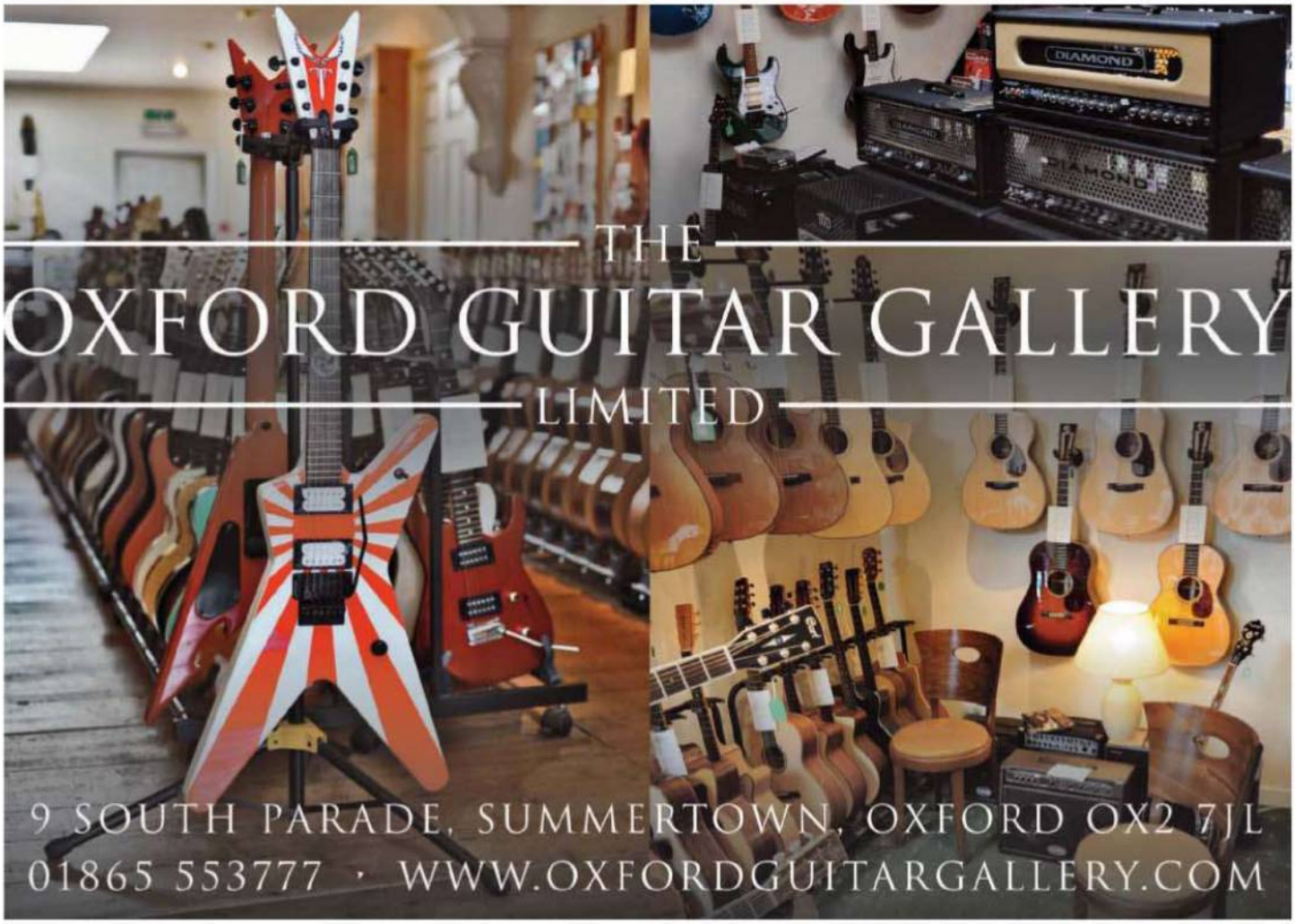

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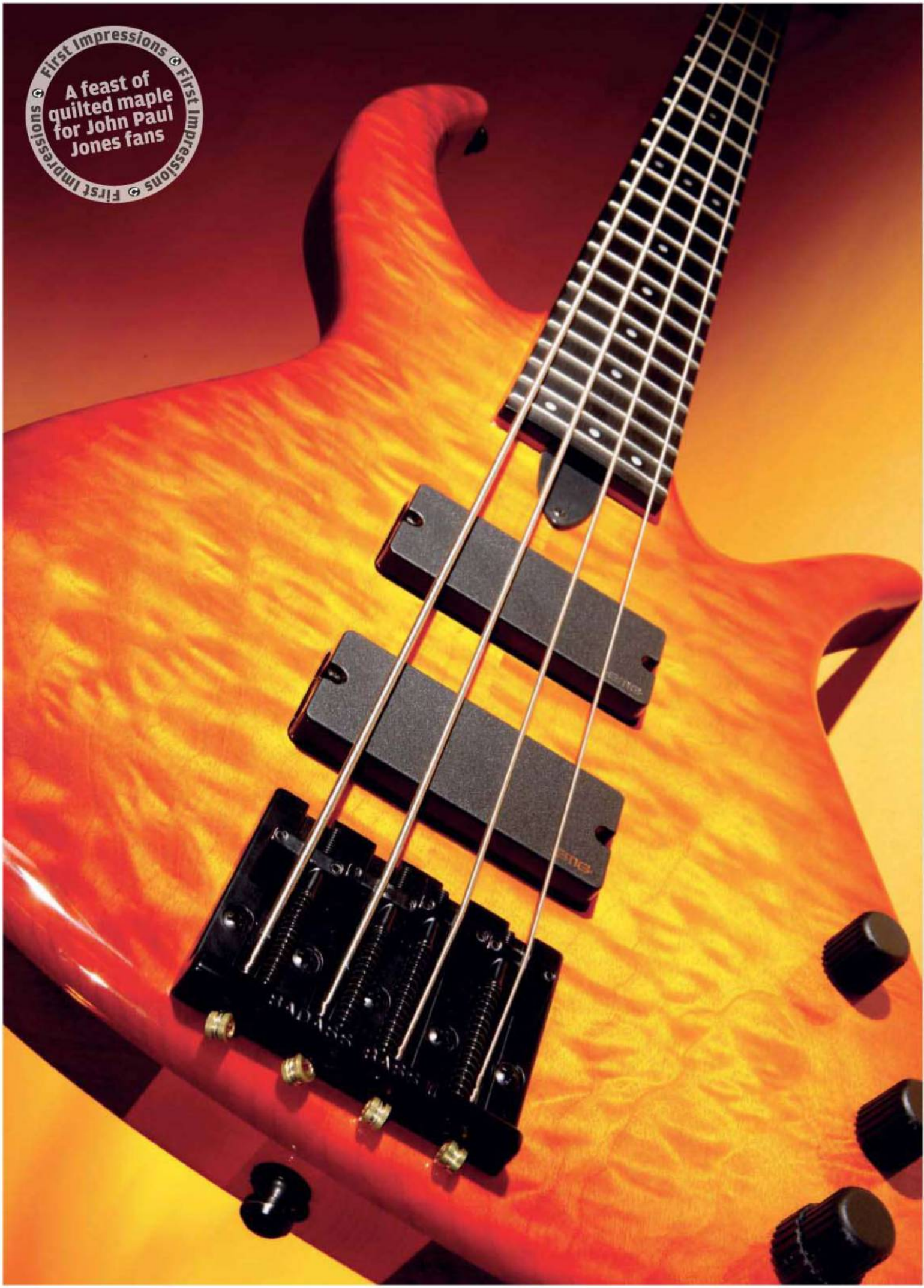
First Impressions

A feast of quilted maple for John Paul Jones fans



Price: £2099

From Led Zeppelin to Them Crooked Vultures, John Paul Jones has kept the torch of true rock ablaze. Fancy playing a bass just like his? Now you can. Review by Gareth Morgan

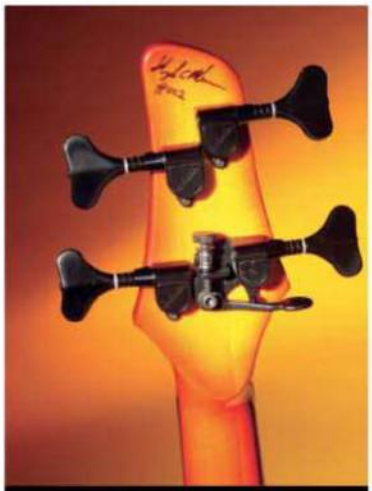
Manson

John Paul Jones Signature Bass

Most of us know John Paul Jones through the mighty conduit that is Led Zeppelin. Think of his basses, and the first one that comes to mind is probably the Fender Jazz he used in the early '70s, then possibly the Alembic slung round his neck at Knebworth. For a long time, though, Jones has been a fan of instruments custom-built by Hugh Manson in Exeter, and he owns a small arsenal of them, including an eight-string and a 12-string. Jones is still fundamentally a four-string player, however, and the Led Zep man's number one bass is now being offered as a signature model, made in limited numbers in the Czech Republic.

The first thing you'll notice about our prototype Manson JPJ is the weight. At 4.5kg/10lbs it's a mighty lump, and we'd advise any interested parties to either buy a comfort strap or tone up those shoulder muscles... or both. The reason for the weight is the density of the body's tight-grained mahogany wings and three-piece maple through-neck. The body is around 42mm thick, a couple of millimetres more than a Jazz or Precision. The top is a two-piece bookmatched slice of quilted maple with a gorgeously marbled grain pattern, finished in a high-gloss aged cherry burst. It must be said that the body is beautifully designed and crafted: it's flat-bottomed in profile, with a subtle forearm chamfer, a generous ribcage recess, a spiky upper horn that extends out as far as the 12th fret and a downwards-pointing lower horn that gives total access to the top fret.

The fingerboard is ebony, the neck a three-piece through-body type with a quilted maple headstock veneer



Black chrome Schaller machineheads are augmented by a Hipshot D-tuner for low D action at the flip of a lever

This signature version of the Led Zep man's number one Manson bass is made in limited numbers in the Czech Republic

The neck has a shallow 'C' contour. It's lacquered in cherry burst at body and headstock but has been left unbursted for most of its playing length. There's a reinforcing bulge behind the nut, and the headstock is neat, compact and round-edged, with a matching quilted maple veneer face plus JPJ's signature. The tuners are black Schallers, and there's a Hipshot D-Tuner on the E string. The Hipshot is an ingenious device; most people set it to drop to D but it can go as low as C, provided care is taken with the choice of string gauge. Simply flip the catch, and hey presto - you're lower.

The ebony fingerboard carries 24 expertly-seated medium jumbo frets. There are white dot markers on its face, with three at both 12th and 24th frets, and a further set along the top edge.

FACTFILE

JOHN PAUL JONES SIGNATURE

Description: Solidbody bass. Made in Czech Republic

Price: £2099 inc. deluxe gigbag

Build: Two-piece quilted maple top over mahogany wings, three-piece maple through-neck with 24 medium jumbo nickel frets on an ebony fingerboard. Quilted maple headstock veneer. Schaller tuners with Hipshot D-Tuner, Badass bridge, black hardware

Electrics: Active with one EMG DC (neck) and one EMG 35 TW Dual Coil (bridge) and EMG BTC preamp. Volume (pull for bridge pickup coil tap), Balance, Bass and treble controls

Left hander: No

Finishes: High gloss aged cherry burst only

Range Options: None

Scale length: 864mm/34"

Width of neck:
Nut 38mm
12th fret 55mm

Depth of neck:
First fret 20mm
12th fret 23mm

String spacing:
Nut 10mm
Bridge 19mm

Action as supplied:
12th fret treble 1.5mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm

Weight: 4.55/10lbs

Contact:
Mansons Guitar Shop
01392 496 379
www.mansons.co.uk

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THE COMPETITION

D'ALEGRIA
Defender JB Deluxe
Custom-made in Brazil, this beautiful bass oozes class from every pore
RRP: £2517

SADOWSKY
MV4-HPJ
Lots of quality sounds from this superb rendition of the P/J template
RRP: £1785

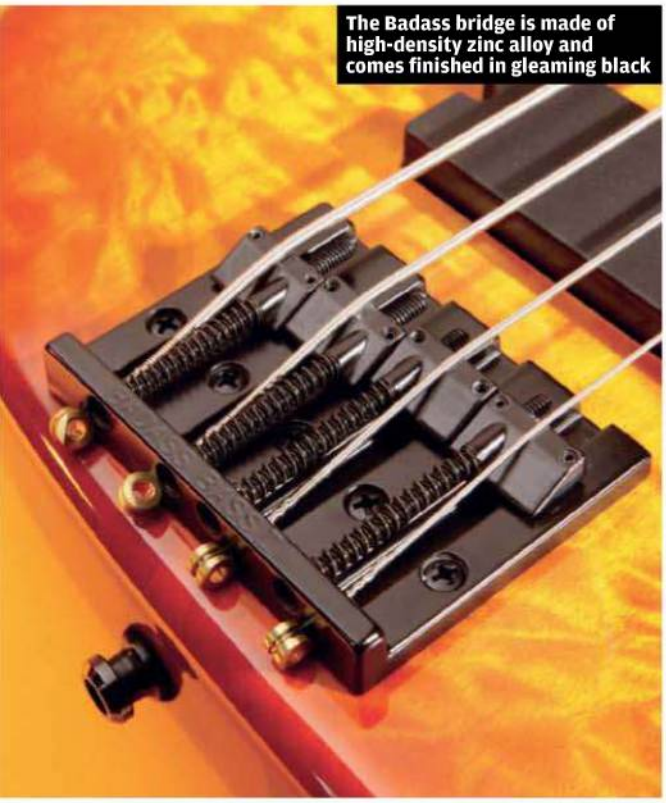
MAYONES
Be-4
Hand-built in Poland, this is another contemporary instrument with an excellent range of sounds
RRP: £1329

The bridge is a Badass Bass II and the pickups are an EMG 35TW Dual Coil and an EMG 35DC by the neck (only the first five basses made will have the DC; later ones will have an EMG 35 P4). The preamp is an EMG BTC powered by a 9v battery in a separate compartment of the screw-in variety (the second best option). Controls number Bass and Treble in a stack knob configuration and individual Volume and Pan dials. Pulling up the Volume control activates a coil tap on the bridge pickup to produce what Manson calls 'a more traditional sound similar in output to a vintage passive bass.'

SOUNDS

Since this is an up-to-date, mods-and-all replica of the bass John Paul Jones has been using with Them Crooked Vultures, we're hoping it brings as much of his sound to the tips of our fingers as possible – and that means a lot of bottom end but also plenty of clarity.

You do get plenty of clarity, even with the EQ flat. Both pickups combine for a warm, pleasing snarl with colourful overtones at the bottom and a high-mid chime on the thinner strings. The neck pickup is earthier and more acoustic, and higher registers have a sweet sound with plenty of detail and no brittleness. Although the bridge EMG has plenty of output, to our ears it's too thin and high-middly to be really appropriate as a typical Jones tone, and in this un-EQ'd form it hasn't got the impact to make it useful for modern funky fingerstyle.


The Badass bridge is made of high-density zinc alloy and comes finished in gleaming black

The bridge pickup is a single/dual-coil EMG 35TW with coil tap; the neck pickup is a ceramic humbucking 35DC

With added bass EQ the neck pickup's sweet high registers have a retro softness, perfect for melodic Zep parts

All three pickup settings lack the bottom end you might associate with the Vultures or Led Zeppelin, but the solution lies with bass EQ, which brings in enough booty to fatten things up nicely. With both pickups we get more body and impact but without excessive snap, making this a good option for dual-riffing forays. The neck pickup is still earthy and detailed but now has far more authority, and the sweeter higher registers have a retro softness that's perfect for melodic Zeppelin parts. Adding bottom also evens out the bridge pickup, reducing the honky zing. It's certainly more practical, if a little lacking in rock'n'roll credentials.

Overall the JPJ has plenty of definition and detail, so you'll only resort to boosting Treble if you need to be extra-percussive. This acts like a tonal spring-cleaning, and it's most fun on the neck pickup where it polishes the rubbery core and acoustic zing to give a militantly retro sound that you really can imagine Jones using, both live or for cutting through multiple guitar overdubs. Finally, the coil-tap has a lower output but doesn't provide any extra warmth or punch.

VERDICT

The Manson JPJ stands on its own as a high-quality active bass. The main drawback is its weight, but a modern comfort strap negates this problem a little. It's fun to play, and the shallow, fairly narrow neck makes it fast and suitable for contemporary techniques. Does it give you the John Paul Jones feel and sound? The answer is yes – but it's expensive when compared to much of the similarly spec'd competition. If you have a yearning to dig out a few old Zep tunes or bust a few Vultures moves, though, this has got to be a first-choice bass.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	16/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	**84%**

Good for... Doing the JPJ thing... and quite a lot more besides

Look elsewhere... If the budget won't stretch this far, or you want a passive sound

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Rosewood
£2680

Price: £669.99

Let's see: 500W with pseudo valve circuitry, a compressor and plenty of EQ, through a 4x10" cab. Yup, that should just about do the trick. Review by Gareth Morgan

Hartke

HA5500C 500W Head & AK410 Cab

First Impressions: Good to have the HA series back in its original livery

The predecessors to Hartke's HA5500C appeared in 1991, but they've undergone a few changes along the way. They're not made in Korea any more, but China. Also, a dalliance with silver amp faces and tolex-covered wooden cases has been abandoned; the HA heads are back in their plain black, rack-mountable birthday suits. This month we're reviewing the HA5500C and one of Hartke's new sealed dual-chamber AK410 cabs with paper-coned drivers and an adjustable horn.

This head chucks out a hefty 500W. The HA5500C is a basic oblong steel case standing 440mm wide, 328mm deep and 100mm high on rubber feet. There's only a single carry handle on one side as it's designed, as we've said, to be rack-mounted (mounting ears are provided).

The control panel is businesslike: a 10-band graphic EQ takes centre stage with 15dB cut/boost available at 30, 64, 125, 250 and 500Hz and at 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8kHz. There's a pair of inputs for active and passive basses and two gain controls: Tube simulates valve amp gain with the aid of a single valve and what Hartke coyly calls 'special circuitry', and Solid State does exactly what it says on the tin via more 'special circuitry'.

Next there's a Compression level control for the internal compressor/limiter, and the roster is completed by Master Volume and two Contour controls, Low Pass and High Pass, offering 18dB cut/boost over a frequency band centered on 100Hz and 10kHz. As well as two Speaker Output jack sockets, the back panel boasts an FX loop with wet/dry Balance control, and an XLR DI Out with Pre/Post and Ground Lift buttons.

Though the specs haven't changed, the 5500C head is an excellent reintroduction

SOUNDS

The 5500C sounds pretty good even before resorting to tweaking the EQ. What you get out of it pretty much replicates what your bass puts in, with perhaps a bit more detail and a livelier feel. Hartke recommends setting the Low and High Pass before resorting to EQ to take account of your playing environment (glass, stone, carpet, etc). Low Pass gives anything from a subtle thickening to a sound that's totally awash with boom, while High Pass moves from a touch more clarity to aggressively clanky.

Once you've set the basis of your sound, the cool-looking EQ is on hand to deal with the details. If you want thudding lows to fill out your fat rock root notes or need something a little mushier that still cuts through for dance music and dub, these can be easily dialled up: boost 30 and 64Hz for as much bass as you can handle, and dial in extra definition by nudging the midrange sliders... or cut them back for super-smooth scooped mids. If you're after more punch, the lower mid controls (125 and 250Hz) get you there, while the higher mids add a pleasing rasp and a brighter sheen. For head-slicing contemporary rock, there's plenty of zing and clarity available, replete with a growling edge.

VERDICT

Even though the specs haven't really changed since the HA's inception, this 5500C is an excellent reintroduction of a robust, powerful amplifier with plenty of tonal options. There's a lot of competition out there but this has to be a worth a look if you're after a high-power bass head that won't break the bank.

FINAL SCORE

Build Quality	18/20
Playability	18/20
Sound	17/20
Value for money	16/20
Vibe	16/20
TOTAL	**85%**

Good for... Solid power and a solid tone in a wide variety of styles

Look elsewhere... For a more lightweight option or, conversely, the pure valve experience

FACTFILE

HA5500C & AK410

Description: HA5500C: 500W single channel transistor/tube head AK410 cabinet: 500W cab with 4x10" Custom heavy duty speakers and one 1" titanium HF compression horn in a sealed 16mm birch plywood cabinet. Both made in China

Price: £669.99 & £529.99

Controls: HA5500C: Tube and Solid State Preamp, Compression, Low Pass, High Pass, Master Volume and FX Balance controls, 10-band graphic equalizer with In/Out switch. Passive and Active inputs, twin speaker outs and FX loop jack sockets, XLR DI Out with Pre/Post and Normal/Ground Lift switches. AK410: two jack and two Speakon inputs, Horn On/-6dB/Off switch

Range Options: 350W HA3500C head, £499.99; 250W HA2500 head, £339.99; 400W AK115 1x15" cab, £414.99

Contact: Korg UK 01908 857100 www.hartke.com

THE COMPETITION

MARKBASS
R500 500W hybrid head
A conservative-looking offering from Markbass. High quality, high power, light weight
RRP: £799

EUPHONIC AUDIO
iAMP Micro head 550W
At 1kg the iAmp has an incredible power-to-weight ratio. It's easy to use and sounds fantastic, too
RRP: £649

AMPEG
SVT-7PRO 1000W head
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Single Minded

If you're looking for warmth without mud and chime without brittleness, then pretty soon, says Phil Harris, you're going to come face to face with Gibson's fat-coiled P90 –and fall in love

P90s? Whether they are soapbar, dogear or cat's bum, I love them all. I got turned on to them from an early age when I realised that my brother's SG Junior was so much more powerful than my Watkins and Burns guitars. As time moved on and I saw bands like Canned Heat playing Les Paul goldtops with P90s, while everyone in the crowd was getting into the music, I was being a stickler for details and noticing how their P90 pickups didn't have the same kind of covers as the one on my brother's guitar.

Why should you care about P90s? Well, if you want to play mainstream rock'n'roll, there are really only two pickups: the P90 and the humbucker. Some makers have tried to combine the two, but that's never really appealed to me. It's like mixing a sports car with a nice coupe; you don't want a coupe that goes at 200mph - it defeats the object.

Many consider the P90 to be the weaker version of the humbucker, whereas the P90 is actually more direct and moves more air. Granted, humbuckers usually possess more subtlety, but I've come across some P90s that can add a lot of nuances to your sound. You can get three instruments of the same model from the same year and the pickups on them will all provide a different flavour. The 'most P90' guitar I've ever owned was a 1955 Les Paul Junior. I bought it for £220 back in 1973 and foolishly decided to use it for the gig I was playing in Manchester that night. I didn't soundcheck, and my Orange stack was set up for my Les Paul Standard. The sound was five times louder and fatter than normal and the rest of the band weren't too pleased with me. That was a true beast of a guitar. At the other end of the spectrum, my most unconventional P90-equipped guitar was - and is to this day - a 1967 Gibson ES-330 that had a 335-style neck join - it was just the purest, sweetest tone imaginable.

'You might come across something that breaks the mould. That's one of the wonders of the P90 – the possibilities are always there'

In my experience, when you're talking about P90-fitted guitars made between 1956 and 1962, about 60 per cent are real kickass, 20 per cent are sweet, and 20 per cent are a bit woolly and don't interest me at all.

However, you might well come across something that breaks the mould. That's one of the wonders of this pickup - the possibilities are always there. You can take a generally accepted rule such as single-cut Les Paul Juniors are more powerful than double-cuts, but if you play enough of them you'll find a number of double-cuts where the P90 can more than hold its own.

So if you tell me you've got a special 'one of a kind' P90 on your guitar, I'll take your word for it. However, don't try and tell me they aren't much cop. Listen to the Who's *Live At Leeds*, and if you still think that... keep taking the tablets.

1960 Gibson Florentine Mandolin

Let's start with this lovely curiosity. This shortened version of a P90 (what all lovers of a corny joke call 'a P45') sounds amazing. To put it in context, it's fitted onto a one-piece mahogany body with a carved top, same as something like a mid-'50s Les Paul Custom, but with a little eight-string neck sticking off it. You can get a great bell-like tone from this, but it can also scream in a heavy metal fashion. And yes, you can play the intro to *Maggie May* on it too – and that's about as far as my mandolin prowess goes

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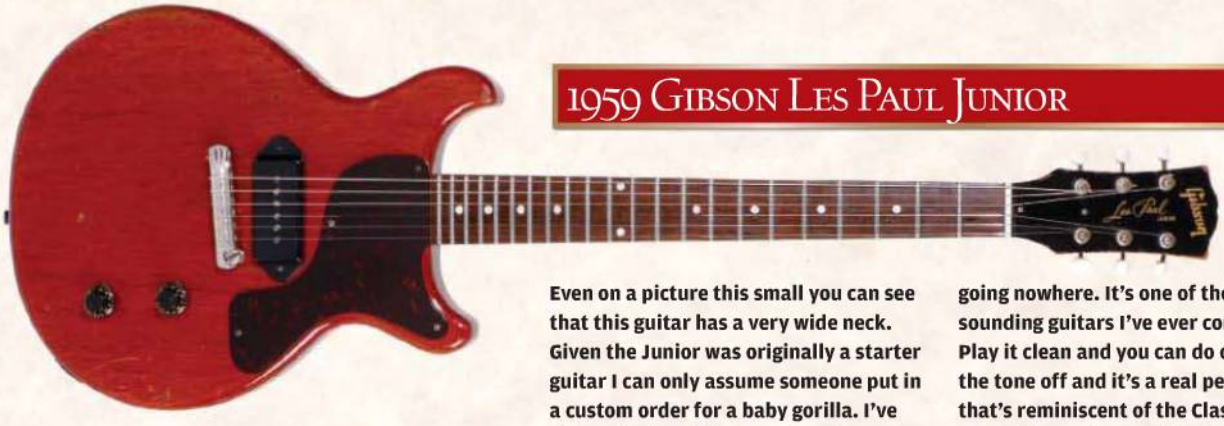
Hooked on Classics

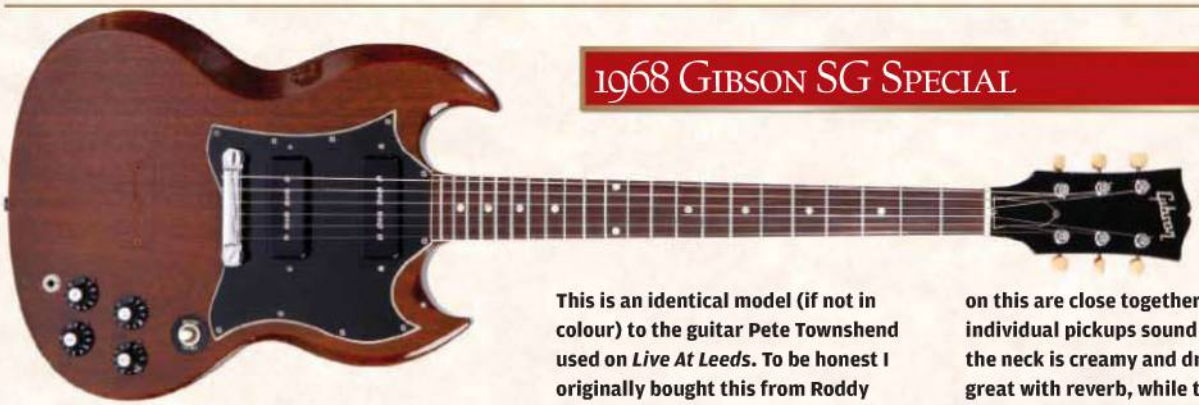


1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior

Even on a picture this small you can see that this guitar has a very wide neck. Given the Junior was originally a starter guitar I can only assume someone put in a custom order for a baby gorilla. I've changed a few things, such as the machineheads, in the 20 years I've owned this guitar, but the pickup is going nowhere. It's one of the best-sounding guitars I've ever come across. Play it clean and you can do country; roll the tone off and it's a real pea-souper that's reminiscent of the Clash. It's got as much attack, spread and sustain as you can handle, and then plenty more that you really can't handle

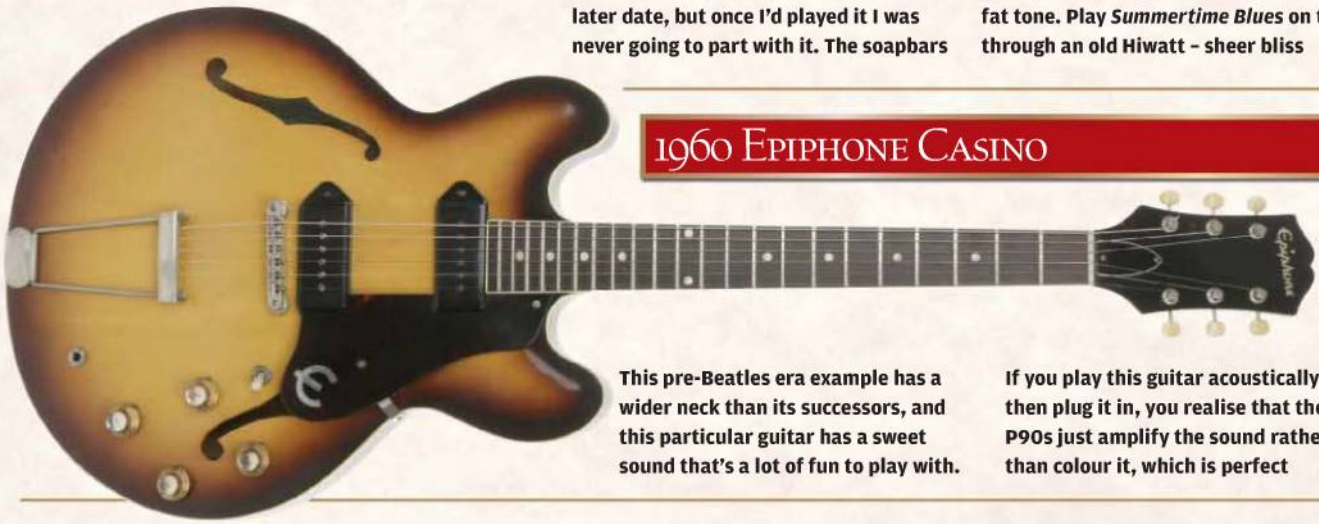
1957 Gibson ES-125

In a similar vein to the Junior, the ES-125 was created as an economy starter model for budding jazz guitarists. However, it was built with the same maple body and Honduran mahogany neck you get on its more expensive counterparts. They could have put a humbucker on, but they obviously thought a P90 was more appropriate. And it fits this guitar very nicely: you won't get far playing like Satriani on this, but it's got a wonderful pure tone that's great for chords



1968 Gibson SG Special

This is an identical model (if not in colour) to the guitar Pete Townshend used on *Live At Leeds*. To be honest I originally bought this from Roddy Frame's manager simply to sell it on at a later date, but once I'd played it I was never going to part with it. The soapbars on this are close together, but the individual pickups sound very different: the neck is creamy and dreamy and goes great with reverb, while the bridge is glassy and cutting but still capable of a fat tone. Play *Summertime Blues* on this through an old Hiwatt – sheer bliss



1960 Epiphone Casino

This pre-Beatles era example has a wider neck than its successors, and this particular guitar has a sweet sound that's a lot of fun to play with. If you play this guitar acoustically then plug it in, you realise that the P90s just amplify the sound rather than colour it, which is perfect

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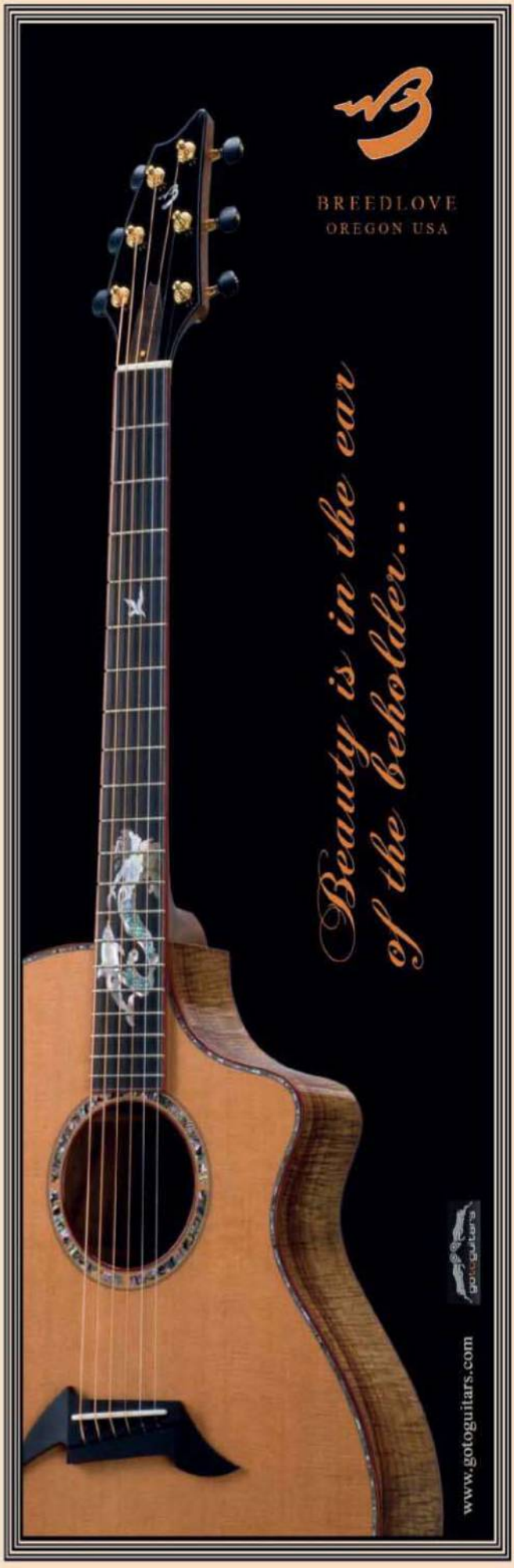

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Sheer Guitar Attack

Guitar workaholic Jamie Humphries plays theatre shows, makes tuition DVDs, does show demos and much more – and he's gained a few endorsements along the way. Lars Mullen drops in

Guitar tuition has changed dramatically with DVDs and online schooling all ready available, and Jamie Humphries is heavily involved with all the new formats. He's written many tuition books, including his own 'Jam With' series, and he works as a transcriber for popular CD libraries. Luckily, Jamie has perfect pitch and the enviable knack to be able to spontaneously transcribe a piece of music to paper. Tuition has been close to his heart since an early experience...

'I remember when I was about 11 I asked a guy how he played this fantastic lick,' Jamie recalls. 'He just fired it off and said "Like that, mate," and all his friends laughed. I thought, if I ever get good at this, then I'll help anyone who asks me.

'It's strange, but many things have gone full circle. When I was just four years old I used to entertain my grandparents by playing air guitar to *Bohemian Rhapsody* on an old breadboard. Now, some 30 years later, I play guitar for *We Will Rock You* at London's Dominion Theatre.

'I can distinctly remember playing my dad's old acoustic when I was six, just generally picking up chords and basic solos. By the time I was nine, I was jamming with a friend of the same age who played keyboards. We were multi-tracking on this twin-track cassette we had in our den. It was all guitars and Star Wars toys, and as you can see here in my studio, nothing's really changed too much... it's just a little more techno!

'One early guitar of mine that I still have is an '88 Ibanez 540 Power Custom with a bound neck and shark inlays. I had a fixation with Steve Vai and the Jem model at the time, so I changed the pickup arrangement and fitted these very colourful units in a humbucker-single-humbucker configuration. It's signed on the back of the headstock by the guitarist Blues Saraceno.

Shark alert: a red '88 Ibanez 540 and a blue '87 Charvel Model 3

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Fender JD Tele, a real '60 Tele... and Jamie's voice-activated R2D2 tour mascot

Left: a Burns Brian May. Below, an early PRS Custom 24

Above left: Jamie's first Music Man, an Axis Sport, and another with P90s instead of humbuckers

'I played the Ibanez for years as I was into screaming harmonics and divebombing, but I took a massive U-turn around '92 and started playing Telecasters, so it ended up back in its case. I succumbed to an ex-girlfriend's idea that I should sell it... well, that won't happen again, that's for sure. I was devastated, but about 10 years later I met the same guy again and he just knew I wanted it again, so he sold it back to me for the same amount. I'm about to replace the humbuckers with a red and yellow Dimarzio Andy Timmons at the bridge and a purple and green PAF Joe in the neck position. I like an off-the-wall guitar, especially if it plays as good as this one.

'I have an ongoing project to renovate this '87 USA-built Charvel Model 3. It's going to sustain forever thanks to the mahogany body, through mahogany neck and the George Lynch Screaming Demon humbucker.

'I had a Steve Vai floral model from the late '80s which I actually traded for this sunburst Jerry Donahue Tele. This guitar became a massive part of the way I play, and I still use it to this very day. I liked the style and feel of it, but I'd also just got into Richie Kotzen and had seen him playing hot Teles when he was playing with Poison, so I set about upgrading most of the hardware.

'I installed a DiMarzio Fast Track T pickup at the bridge, the same that Richie used, changed the bridge, and put a different Strat pickup at the neck. I had the fingerboard radius flattened and installed 6100 frets, so it became a real shred machine in a vintage bound-body guise. With split-coil facilities and a five-way switch it still has loads of twang and spank, but with plenty of beef. I used this one for most of the rhythm tracks on my first CD, simply called *J*.

'I became friends with Richie and we recorded a track together called *Fubar*, and he actually thought this was one of his signature Teles! It's that full circle thing again, as the JD Tele ended up being used by the player I had based the whole idea on.

'For ages I had a hankering for a vintage Telecaster and thought maybe I should invest in a pre-CBS one. It was a big decision. At one point I found myself at a store called Solidbody Guitar in Minnesota, who had some incredibly expensive old Teles. When I got home they emailed me loads of pictures of this blonde 1960 with a rosewood slab board, and offered it to me at the price they said they paid for it. It's totally authentic in the way it looks and sounds.

'I succumbed to a girlfriend's idea that I should sell the Ibanez. That won't happen again, for sure'

'For me there's something so earthy about these old Telecasters. This one has the alternative pickup switching. Position 1 is the bridge, and 2 – which is normally bridge and neck – is just the neck, while position 3 is the neck but with a capacitor wired into the circuit so the tone control is completely off. Apparently this was originally done to try to lure jazzers away from big-bodied semis. Of course it didn't work out, but it's pretty cool that this Tele is still wired this way. I look after it, of course, but I've gigged it locally in the pub.'

Jamie needs to have his equipment sorted, for as well as the Queen gig he can be called in to do shows at the drop of a hat. 'With the Queen show everything has to be 100 per cent accurate. For that gig I use this green Brian May with a Wilkinson vibrato – a godsend, as it returns to correct pitch every time. It's essential, as we switch from song to song so quickly. I also think it looks really cool in dark transparent green.

'Initially Teles were okay, but I needed something a little more meaty. I had a call from a friend to check out a neat looking secondhand PRS in a shop in Chatham. It looked really nice in see-through red with birds and all the trimmings, but the seller wanted £1100. I told the guy in the shop, call him and tell him I've got £800 right now. I was only trying it on, but he came back and said okay. I had it checked out, and the serial number is 0523 which means 1986. It has what's now known as the sweet switch, and the pickups have T and B written underneath for treble and bass, so they're prototypes. It's a really early PRS, and I think I got a bargain.

'But the biggest of all the guitar brands for me has to be Music Man. I bought a Steve Morse instructional video called *Power Lines* in the mid-'80s, and fell in love with his guitar with the four-and-two machinehead arrangement. Anyone who knows me or has been a student of mine will also know I love everything about Eddie Van Halen... hence my stripy Eddie shoes! I remember going with friends up to London's Denmark Street just to see this guitar shop window full of Eddie's signature model. I became a regular visitor to the Music Man stand at every guitar show. I usually had to have an EVH forcibly removed from me at the close of each event.

'At one show I was teaching and playing at a Marshall-sponsored event and I also played to open up an evening event which various dignitaries were attending. The Music Man team were there and they approached me and asked me to endorse their guitars, and they ended up sending me this Axis Sport in a see-through honey finish just to see how I liked it. I loved the playability of it and the versatility of having humbuckers and a five-way switch, and I got on with it really well.

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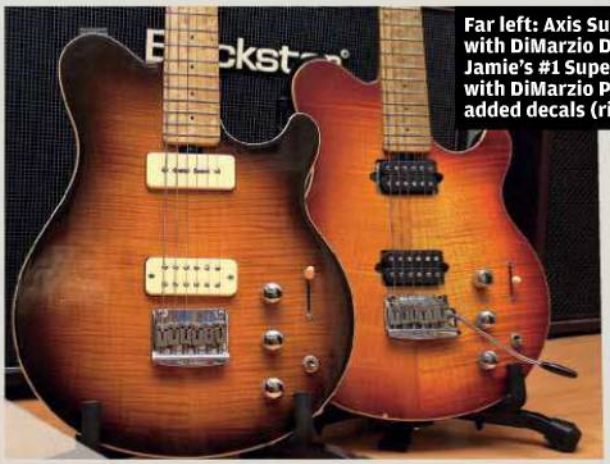

Far left: Axis Super Sport with DiMarzio DLX. Left: Jamie's #1 Super Sport with DiMarzio PAFs – and added decals (right)

1992 Music Man Eddie Van Halen with matching headstock and original 'tone' volume knob

'The Music Man Axis Sport with the DiMarzio PAFs is my tool of the trade, my right hand in music, and basically the one I just can't be without'

'Then they asked for it back, and I was once again devastated! But in the week that followed I got some writing and DVD work with various outlets and they just said, actually, just hang on to it, there's a contract on its way from Ernie Ball – and I've been with Music Man ever since.

'Next there followed an Axis Sport in beautiful sunburst with black P90s, and an Axis Super Sport in tobacco sunburst with cream P90s and a fixed bridge. This last one was put together to my own specifications – it's similar to the hybrid Kotzen Tele. I've fitted a DiMarzio DLX humbucking soapbar to both of these for a little more grunt and clarity. There's something about the playability of these guitars. The necks are just so comfortable, and they're usually constructed from highly figured birdseye maple.

'I didn't know it at the time but these were the forerunners of what I consider to be the most important guitar in my collection, the tool of my trade, my right hand in music, or basically the one I just can't be without – my Axis Super Sport. It's now on its third set of pickups after I had a meeting with Steve Blutcher, the legendary pickup designer at DiMarzio, and he set me up with some Virtual Vintage humbuckers. As my endorsement with DiMarzio grew they sent me a set of 36th Anniversary PAFs because I wanted more of a Van Halen-esque sound, almost like a single coil at the neck. I forgot to mention to them that I really wanted cream and black ones, but I've really got used to the all-black design.

'But that's just cosmetic – the main thing is that the sound this guitar produces is just totally unparalleled. I can have a screaming lead sound, and back off the volume for a crunch, then down a little more and it just cleans up beautifully. It also has a piezo system for an ultra-clean acoustic sound. I've played this on so many tours and on 99.9 per cent of all my DVDs, albums, TV themes and video work, and for most of my on-line tuition lessons. If there's an important job to do, this is the one that goes with me. It's well-travelled... I can't remember how many re-frets it's had. We've both just come back from doing clinics in Japan where I also used it for a 20-minute slot on a DVD for *Young Guitar* magazine – another dream come true, as that was always a favourite overseas magazine for me.'

Next, Jamie breaks out a genuine Music Man Eddie Van Halen signature model dating from '92. 'I was in New York for a few days and spotted it in Sam Ash and kept going back trying to whittle the price down. I was with a bored ex-girlfriend who was huffing and puffing, but then she picked up one of my books they had on display and said "Ooh, look, it's you!" Apparently they liked the book, so the price of the guitar suddenly plummeted and I got it for an absolute steal. I do a lot of Van Halen demos and DVD work, so it gets used a fair bit.

'I also have a gorgeous upgraded blue model with a heavily quilted top. There's not a lot of

Music Man Axis with Sims Custom mirror finish and LED markers

Music Man Silhouette Specials with assortment of DiMarzios

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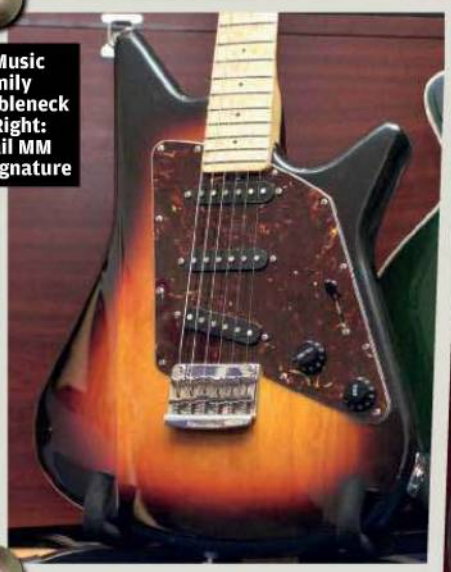
Left: a rare Music Man Ball Family Reserve doubleneck Silhouette. Right: stock hardtail MM Albert Lee signature



'The doubleneck is a big, heavy beast but it looked fabulous on those stadium gigs'

Above, Music Man Luke with EMGs; below, a Music Man Steve Morse

difference – the blue one has a body chamfer and a differently-placed selector switch, and the control says Volume, whereas Eddie's says Tone, as he always said that's what the volume was.

'I needed a high-profile guitar for a TV show and also an *NME* party, so I had the body and fingerboard of my Music Man Axis mirrored by Sims Custom Shop in Kent. They installed red LED position markers, and the laser-cut inlay is the same pattern as my tree of life tattoo. DiMarzio made me a set of chrome-topped Virtual Vintage pickups to complete the whole affair.

'I have three alder-bodied Music Man Silhouettes. They're really versatile all-round guitars and when it comes to comfort the asymmetrical neck profiles really take some beating. The white one is my ultimate Stratty-sounding version, and it's fitted with a DiMarzio Virtual Vintage in the neck and middle with a Solo Pro in the bridge.

'The black Silhouette Special was custom-made for me; it's my take on a Gilmour Strat, and I used it when I got the call to work with Aussie Floyd – another full circle for me, as I loved learning Pink Floyd solos when I was a youngster. It's loaded with a Dimarzio Fast Track 1 in the bridge and Area 58 and 61 pickups in the middle and neck. It's one of my first-choice gigging guitars.

'I had a tour lined up in the USA with the Mystic Orchestra which called for a lot of classic rock sounds like Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd... a lot of '60s material which would benefit from a doubleneck. So I got straight on to Music Man saying I knew that Stuart Smith from the Eagles, John Petrucci and Eddie himself all had one, but they came back saying it wasn't really a production model. But about two weeks later I heard they would do a limited run of Ball Family Reserve models, so I got this one shipped to rehearsals. The cool thing about this guitar is that the six-string neck is at the top. The DiMarzio humbuckers deliver a massive sound. It's a pretty big, heavy beast, but it looked fabulous on those stadium gigs.

'I was recording some Stevie Ray Vaughan tracks for a tutorial DVD and Music Man asked me to play an Albert Lee signature model, as they said it was probably the most Strat-sounding guitar they make. I do like off-the-wall guitars, but the visual aspect of it didn't appeal to me at all.

'When the Albert Lee arrived, though, I plugged it in and immediately fell in love with the sound – the shape of the neck and the body make it one of the most comfortable guitars I own. It looks rather like a futuristic sci-fi Strat, and it's a shape that I've now grown to adore.

'I also have a Music Man Luke in Luke Blue which I use on demos and sessions as part of my job with the company. The neck is rather smaller, but again, thanks to the profile, it's still really comfy for my huge claw-like hands. The output from the active EMGs is very useful, too.

'I do like this Music Man Steve Morse 5M-Y2D signature with the see-through scratchplate. This guitar was originally based on Steve's old Telecaster that he put together himself to make it more of a stripped-down, high-output rock machine with lots of different tones available.

'One of the first guitars that I endorsed and demonstrated for Music Man was this John Petrucci signature in a mystic dream finish. Like all their guitars fitted with a piezo system, you have the choice to blend both the electric and acoustic outputs – or the way I prefer, with separate outputs to the amp or desk. This is the first guitar John used that didn't have a Floyd Rose vibrato. I love the humbucker configuration; it's just a three-way switch but the permutations are bridge, bridge and neck coil-tapped, then neck. It looks cool with the matching headstock, the logo on the first fret and the shield symbol fingerboard inlays. John's signed the back of the headstock, too.

'This John Petrucci seven-string version is a bit of a monster. I needed a guitar for a book and DVD course called *Giants Of Metal*, which

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Left, two MM Petruccis – a seven-string and a six-string with a piezo bridge. Right: a Line 6 Variax guitar

involved heavy chugging chords and low runs in the form of Korn and some of the new metal bands of early 2000, and this one just fell right into the slot and filled every requirement.'

There's no doubt that Jamie is a complete tonehead. If the amp's hot and glowing, he's happy.

'Normally, if it hasn't got valves I really don't want to plug into it, but I'm a bit of a fan of Line 6 after being dragged kicking and screaming on a Pod training course,' he admits. 'I now have quite a lot of their modulation gear in both my studio and touring racks. I was a bit stuck when I needed a sitar sound for a track I was commissioned for, so I called them up and did a deal on this Variax. I must admit the sounds are quite amazing, and it has changed my outlook on some of the better digital products out there. This guitar has been a godsend for recording... but in the end I didn't use the sitar effect after all!

'I've been teaching at the Academy Of Contemporary Music now for 11 years, but a while ago all the teachers were offered Fenders for demonstrating the lessons, and they said we could have look through the catalogue. Well, me being me, I thumbed straight through to the back of the catalogue and asked if I could have a Custom Shop guitar. "Er... no," they said, "but a signature model would be okay." So I went for a Jeff Beck Strat, which I use a hell of a lot.

'This Music Man five-string StingRay bass used to belong to Nick Fyffe from Jamiroquai. He had to do a session for Ferrari, so they sprayed it in Ferrari red and put the famous company logo on it. I don't gig with a bass, but this one is ideal for home session work.

'I have to laugh when I think back to my four-string StingRay bass. I got it specifically to donate to a charity auction and so I had the body signed by a host of Music Man endorsees including Albert Lee, Paul Gilbert, Slash, Steve Vai and Steve Morse - but when it came to the cash, no one put in a decent bid. I wasn't going to let it go for a song, so I bought it back myself!'

For our final guitar, Jamie brings out a personal relic - his first-ever decent electric guitar, which he's been wise enough to keep. 'My dad knew a fair bit about guitars, but in the end it was my grandfather who took me on a trip around the London music shops to have a look at some guitars when I was about 12. It was a bit of a reality shock for him - I think he expected to see the old Selmer Musical Instrument showroom still in existence! I can't remember which place we were in, but it was like *Wayne's World*.

'I thought I'd better not fall in love with the Yamaha, but my grandfather said "Okay, put it in the case"'

'I thrummed away on a wonderful white Yamaha SG 1300T... it had all the fancy trimmings and the gold hardware. I was drawn to it as Carlos Santana was a Yamaha user at the time, and my dad was a Santana fan, and I had just followed suit.

'I thought I'd better not fall in love with it too much, but then my good old grandfather said, "Okay, put it in the case, let's go." And here it is! Over the years I followed the trends by upgrading the vibrato system and changing pickups, but at least I know its full history. It still plays really well, and the old Santana vibe is still buried inside it.'

For more on Jamie's activities visit www.jamiehumphries.com

A Ferrari red MM StingRay 5 and a signature-covered StingRay four-string

Jamie's first good electric – a white Yamaha SG1300

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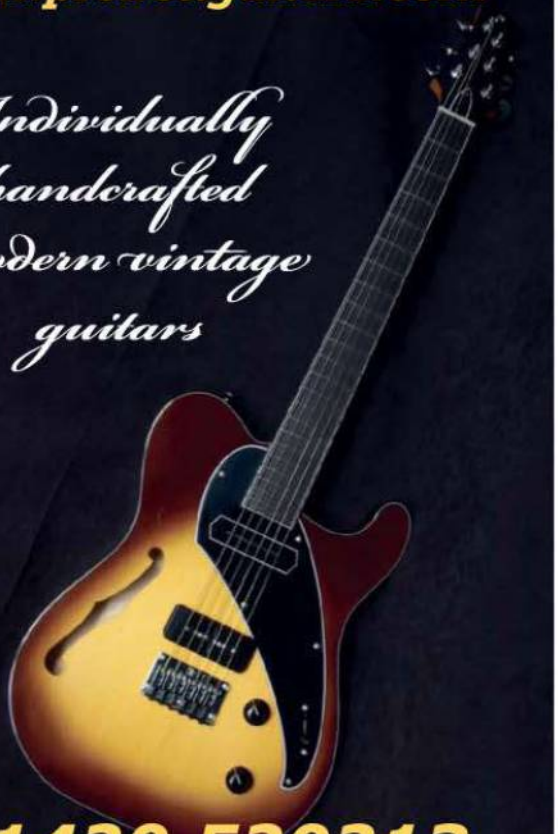

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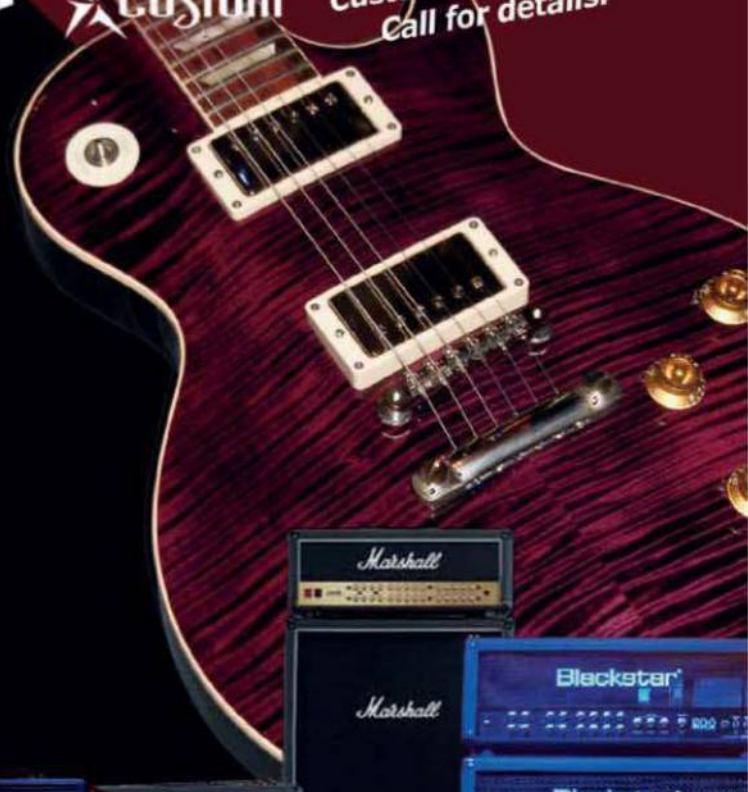

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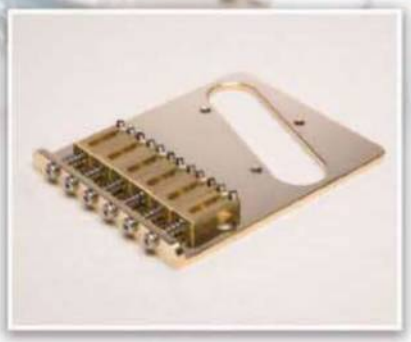

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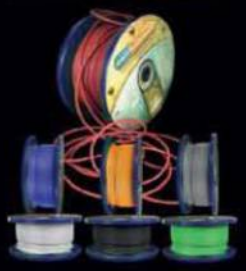

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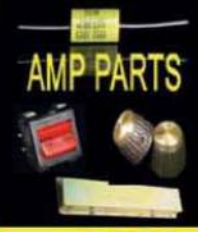

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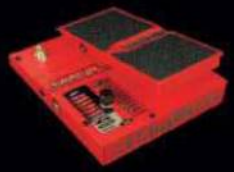

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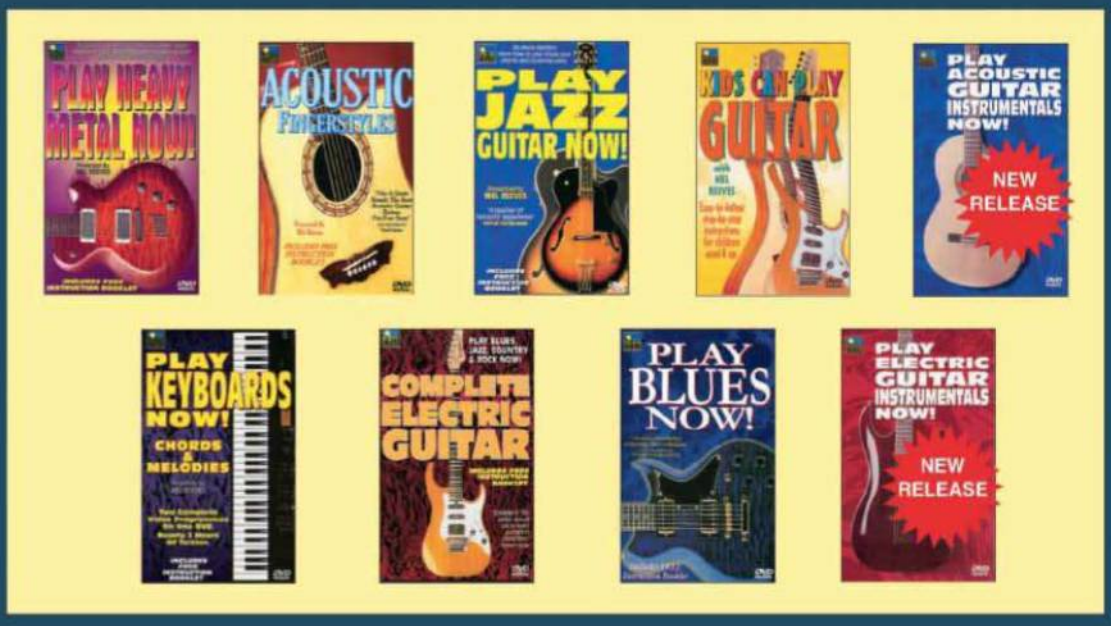

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	C					G		𝄞♭
	D				B♭	𝄽		E
	G		𝄽	𝄞♭			B♭	
		G	𝄞♭			F	D	A
		𝄞♭				E		
D	E	𝄽			A	C		
	𝄞♭			B♭	F		E	
B♭		D	G				A	
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♯	E	D	F	B♭	A	C	A♯	G
G	A♯	C	A	F	B♭	♯	E	D
B♭	♯	E	G	D	C	A♯	F	A
A	D	F	♯	E	A♯	G	B♭	C
D	B♭	A	C	A♯	♯	E	G	F
E	C	♯	B♭	G	F	A	D	A♯
A♯	F	G	D	A	E	B♭	C	♯

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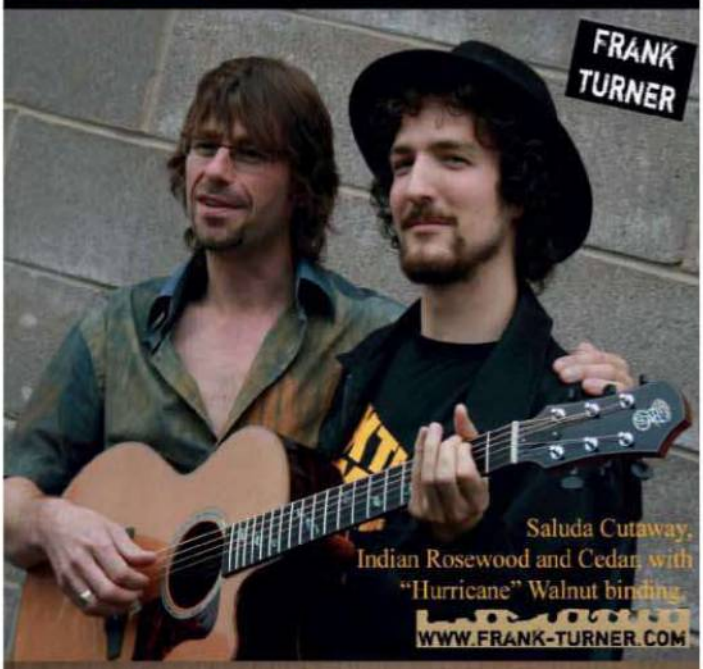

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Richard Thompson

Guitar Techniques

All the greats start early. Richard Thompson picked up the guitar aged about 10 or 11, and had two years or so of classical lessons. 'They were the only real guitar lessons I ever had,' he remembers. 'After that, I learned more from watching other players or sitting down with someone and watching them play than from lessons or records.'

One of the biggest influences on Thompson's guitar playing and songwriting is Celtic music. 'The ornaments that I play are very traditional. I listen to a lot of fiddle and bagpipe playing,' he notes. This is also apparent in his choice of notes for string bending: 'I don't really play with blues. I bend notes on the guitar, and that comes from the blues so it's somewhere in my playing, but not very strongly. I guess I do bend notes differently than a blues player would, and I certainly don't choose the same pitches to bend. Some bends, like the seventh up to the root, flattened second up to the second, or the third up to the fourth, are real bagpipe-derived things.' Thompson also uses bagpipe-derived ornaments in his playing - see Ex 1 for a look at ornaments, and Ex 2 for an illustration and exploration of bends.

On acoustic guitar Thompson often uses open tunings. Dropped D is used for *King Of Bohemia* - DADGBE from bottom string to top string. He often uses DADGAD 'for Celtic things. I used that on *Two Left Feet*.' He occasionally uses variations on DADGAD, including FGDGAD, CGDGAD and DADEAE. Another variation, FGDGCD, is good for playing Scottish tunes. 'I only use it for instrumentals, like *Shepherd's March/Maggie Cameron* and *Watching The Dark*. Many Scottish tunes are in A and are easily played in this tuning with a capo on the second fret.' See Ex 3 for an illustration of *Shepherd's March/Maggie Cameron*.

Despite his considerable versatility and prowess, Thompson does not see himself as a particularly proficient player. 'Technically I'm not the greatest guitar player; I try and play from emotion first of all,' he points out. 'If I'm singing and playing I've usually got my eyes shut, and when I miss a fret - which is frequently! - I just think that's part of the emotion.'

Unlike some guitarists whose style may be defined in a few licks and playing techniques, Thompson's playing is more diverse and eclectic. Hence, the following exercises merely touch on the basics of the man's superb guitar playing.

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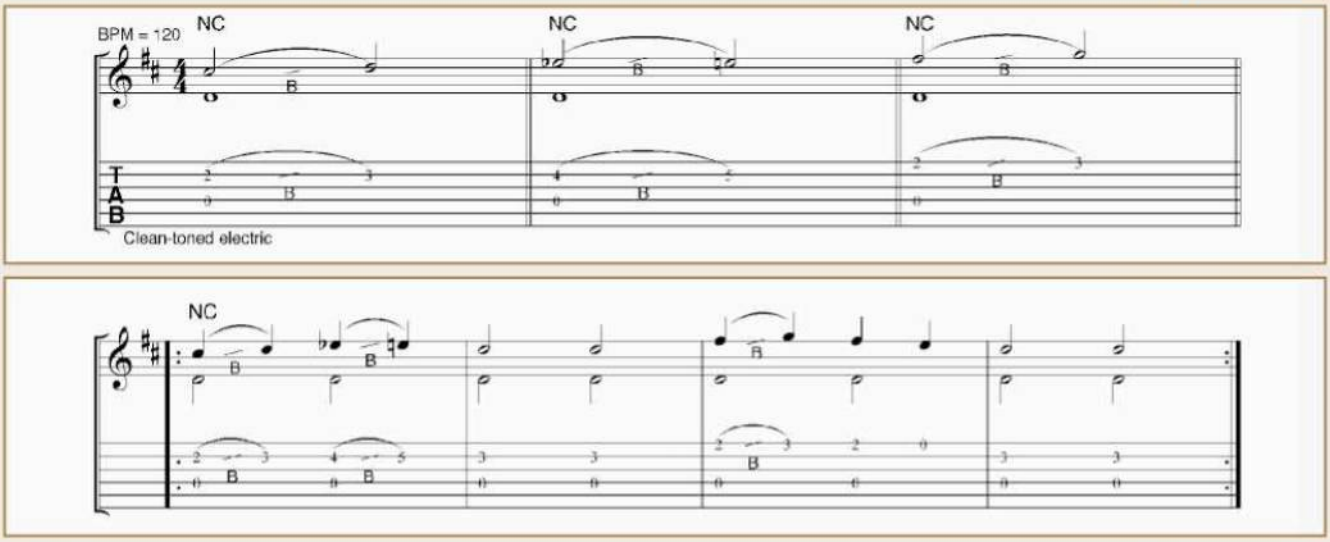
Ex 1: Ornaments

4/4 Time

The Choice Wife from *1000 Years of Popular Music* is a traditional tune inspired by Irish piper Willie Clancy; 'I tune to DADGAD and I'm trying to imitate his trills, hammer-ons and pull-offs, which on the guitar is a bit of a stretch. Uilleann piping music is very complex, and it's fun to try to get close.' This exercise looks at some of the easier ornaments, all played against an open D drone. The first two bars show ornament notation; the second two bars are without. Bar 1 beats 1 and 3 show hammer-on and pull-off 'acciaccaturas' - grace notes played as quickly as possible. Beat two shows a mordent - the written note, the note above it in the scale then the original, played with a hammer-on and a pull-off. Beat 4 is an 'inverted' mordent using the scale note below the original note. Bar 2 beats 1 and 2 contain a trill between the written note and the note below it; trills can also be between the written note and the note above it in the scale. Bars 3 and 4 are the same as bars 1 and 2, but with these ornaments written out in full.

Ex 2: Bends

4/4 Time



Here are some bagpipe-derived bends over an open D drone. First we have a bend from the major seventh to the root, then the minor second to the natural second, the then the third up to the fourth. The second line shows a four-bar melody with all three. Bar 1 has a very exotic bend from minor second to natural second; for a less pronounced effect, make the Eb minor second into a grace note by bending up to E, and give the E two beats.

Ex 3: Shepherd's March/Maggie Cameron fingerpicking

6/8 Time

Thompson asserts that *Shepherd's March/Maggie Cameron* is in FGDGCD with a capo at the second fret; however, the version on *Watching the Dark* is in DGDGCD without a capo. The first line is similar to the start of this version, played with a lilting 6/8 feel. Notice the 'squiggly' sign above the G note in the first bar - this is a mordent again, so play the G, then hammer on to the A note above it at the second fret, then pull off to G, all as quickly as possible. The second line shows a phrase similar to that at 0:45. 'GB' means 'Gradual Bend', so make the bend last the duration of the note you are bending from. Notice that this bend on the top string is from the major seventh up to the octave or root; this is one of the bends illustrated in Ex 2.

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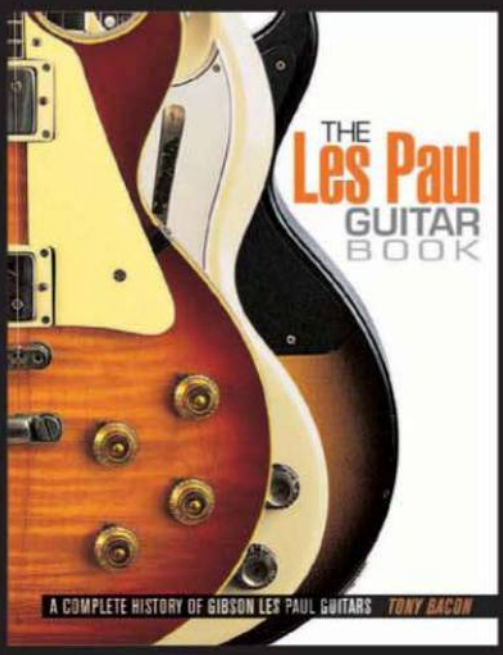

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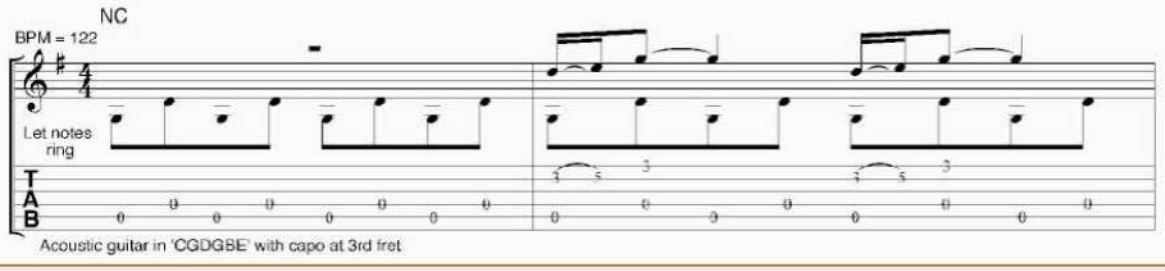
Ex 4: Shepherd's March/Maggie Cameron chromatic pattern

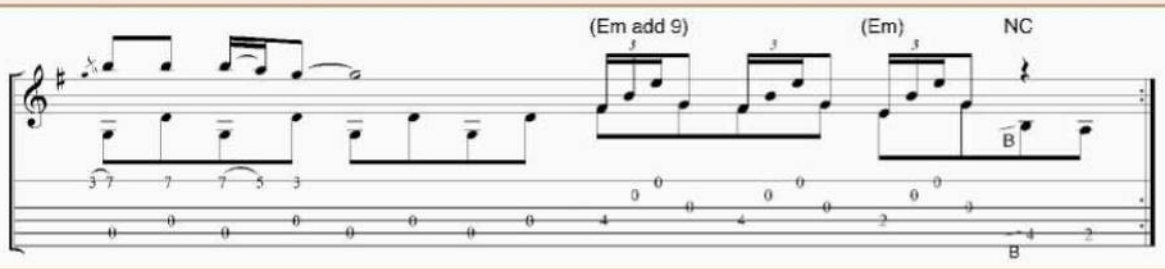
2/2 Time

At 3:12 of *Shepherd's March/Maggie Cameron* Thompson plays an ear-catching phrase similar to that in the exercise above, introducing some chromaticism not normally found in traditional music. Constantly jumping between strings four and three with a hammer-on from each open string to notes higher up the fretboard, the chromaticism is between bar 1, beat two, and bar 2, beats one and two – the fretboard shape is moved up one fret at a time. As stated in exercise 3, *Shepherd's March/Maggie Cameron* is played in DGDGCD without a capo, but this lick is played on the middle two strings only, which are of course at standard pitch – so this exercise can easily be played in standard Spanish tuning.

Ex 5: 1952 Vincent Black Lightning fingerpicking

4/4 Time



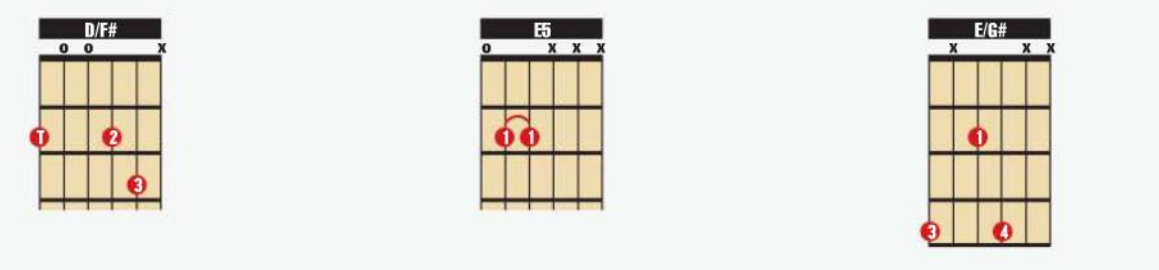


'This is my most requested song,' said Thompson of *1952 Vincent Black Lightning*, his classic tale of a doomed love affair between a red-haired girl and a biker on the wrong side of the law. 'If your magazine asked me for a tab it'd be quite complicated, 'cos there's more happening than just a clawhammer thing. Notes are coming faster than that, so there's a lot of... well, I don't know how to describe it.

Technically speaking, it's tricky!' So, let's break down the technique a little bit. Played on an acoustic in CGDGBE tuning with a capo at the third fret, the music sounds three frets or a minor third higher than written (the tablature numbers are relative to the capo). The bass part on the low strings is plucked with the thumb; practise the first bar over and over until you're comfortable with this.

Then, a melody similar to the intro melody in *1952 Vincent* is added in bars 2 and 3, plucked with index and middle fingers. Bar 4 features a gorgeous chordal-based lick similar to the one used at 0:17 – for each four-note figure, pluck the strings with thumb, index, middle, thumb. This will take a bit of practise to get fluent and up to speed, but the effect is well worth it.

Ex 6: D/F#, E5 and E/G# chords



Here are three chords that you'll need to get a grip on *Shoot Out The Lights*. The D/F# voicing is a D chord but with F# in the bass, the lowest note on the bottom string, fretted with the thumb. The E5 chord is a power chord – the bottom three strings of the basic open E chord. E/G# is a three-note chord involving damping the fifth string by lightly touching it with the third finger. It's often useful as a passing chord between E and A – or between G and A minor.

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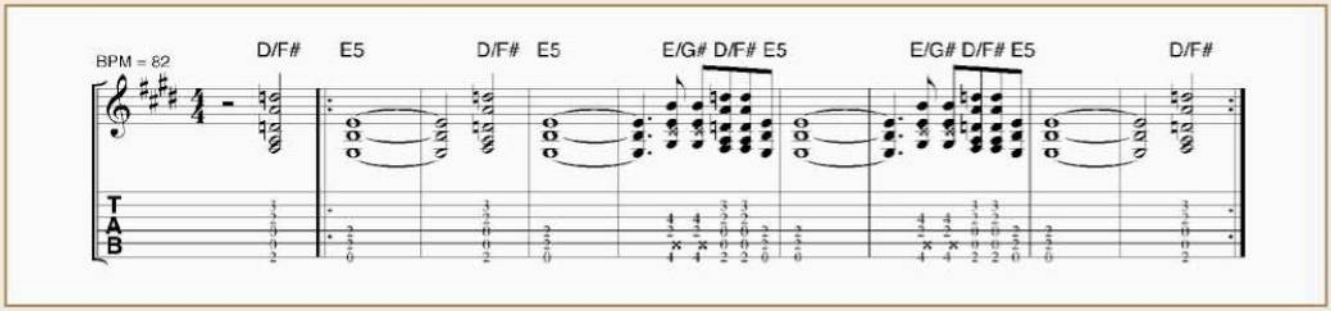
Daring Adventures: a Richard Thompson Gear File

For much of his career Thompson's main electrics were two Strats, a '59 and a '66. 'As a player I don't play very hard. I find the Strat responds easily while maintaining a certain level and consistency to the actual sound that people hear.' He also has a blue custom-built Ferrington. 'It's like a Strat, but a different shape. The pickups – a Broadcaster in the bridge, an alnico Strat in the middle and a Gibson P90 in the neck – interact in an interesting way. It's a test bed guitar and it works well.' He uses a Line 6 amp and effects include a Line 6 delay, a Univibe and a Prunes & Custard. He favours Lowdens: 'I use a couple, a new L32C or FC and an L27SD. The L27 has a Sunrise. Instead of just taking the acoustic signal with an air mic, you can run it through an amp or use the built-in mic. You can get mixed signals, have it three different ways.' He also uses a Ridge Farm Gas Cooker tube preamp.

Ex 7: Shoot Out the Lights chord riff

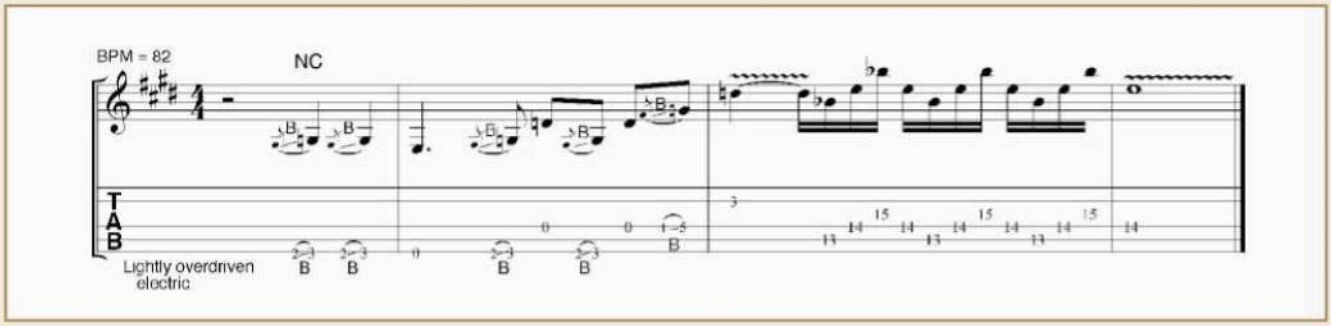
4/4 Time



One of Richard Thompson's best-known electric-based songs, *Shoot Out the Lights*, starts with an instantly recognisable two-chord riff using the voicings from Ex 6. Later in the song, at 0:56, Thompson plays a punchy variation on this riff similar to the chord riffs shown halfway through.

Ex 8: Shoot Out the Lights licks

4/4 Time



Between the two-chord riffs at the start of *Shoot Out the Lights* Thompson plays a variety of licks which vary between different versions. The first phrase above, consisting of just three notes, uses a bend from the second degree to the flattened third, ending on bottom E. The next one, a six-note phrase, starts with the same bend then works onto higher strings, ending on D on the second string, third fret. Thompson often uses pick and middle finger on phrases like this – pick for the low note, finger for the higher note. The final phrase shows his inventiveness and fearlessness: over a basic tonality of E, he plays a repeating figure using two diminished fifths (Bbs) and the tonic note (E), creating a strikingly dissonant effect.

Ex 9: Shoot Out the Lights lead

4/4 Time

Richard Thompson is noted for an inventive lead guitar style,which largely avoids stock blues licks. The exercise is based on a couple of melodic ideas in *Shoot Out The Lights*. The first two bars are based on syncopated octaves played high up the fretboard, similar to a phrase heard at 2:09; notice the bend from the third to the fourth on beat 4, one of Thompson's favoured bends that we explored in Ex 1, but this time it's from a minor third to the fourth. Then, in bar 3, Thompson plays a particularly inventive phrase, both melodically and rhythmically. Melodically, he plays a series of ascending stacked fourths; rhythmically, these notes are grouped into threes but played in semiquavers of four notes to the beat, so each successive pattern starts on a different part of the beat. Thompson modifies the stacked fourths idea on beat. He also uses a similar idea at 3:43, this time playing the phrase as semi-pinched harmonics. The last bar of the exercise is a bend high up the top string from A to B – the bend is held, then the note struck in quavers or half notes and treated with vibrato. Thompson uses a similar technique at 3:51 – try to imitate his distinctive 'nervous' vibrato if you can.

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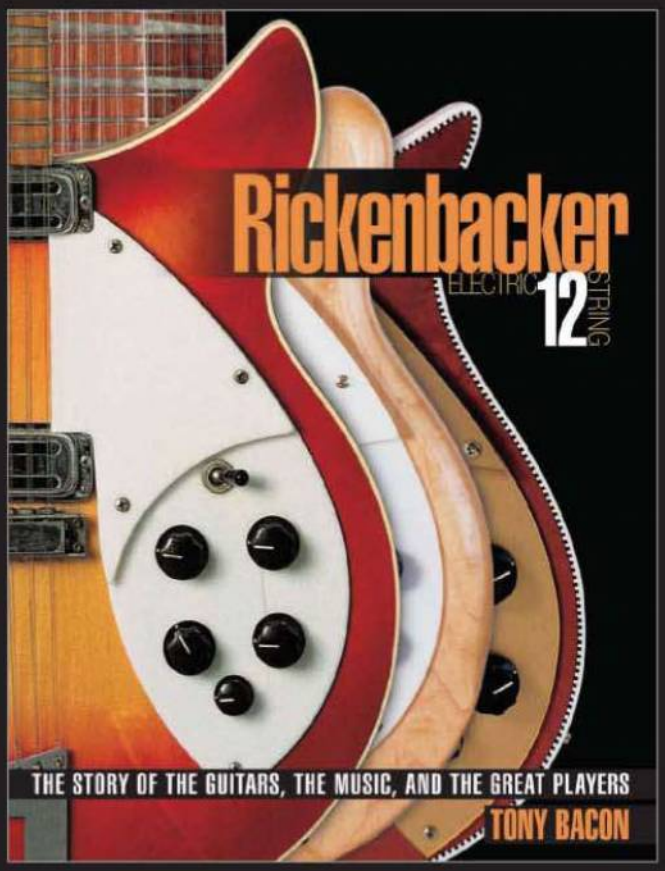

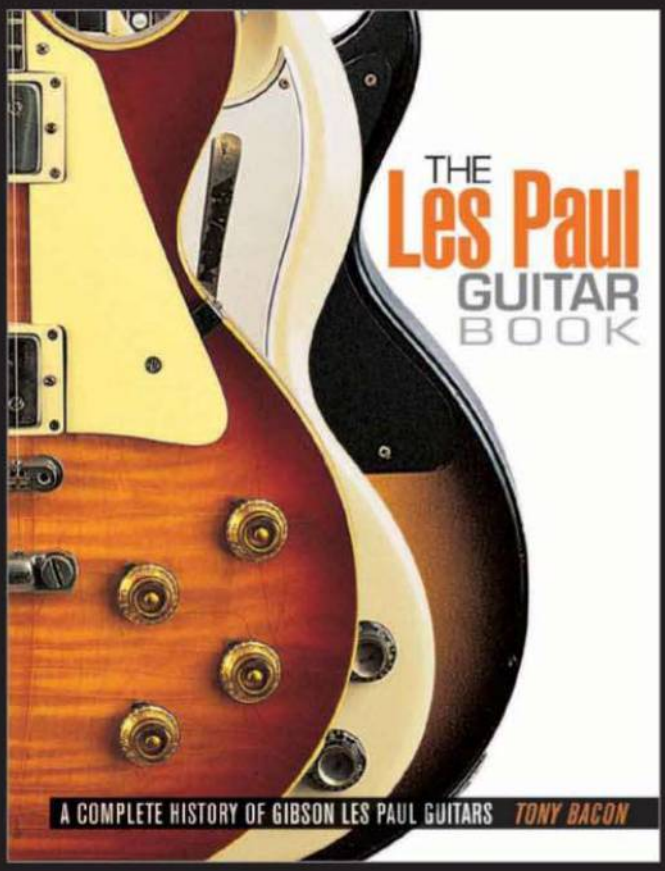

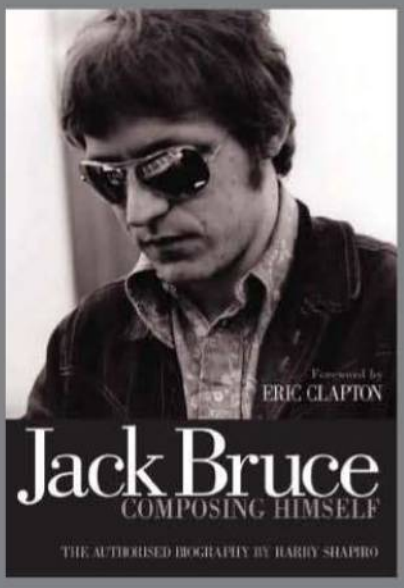

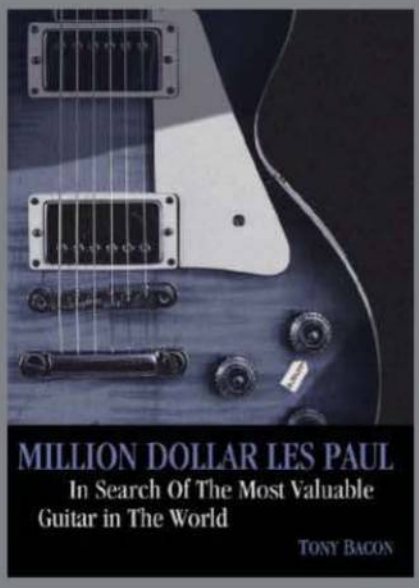

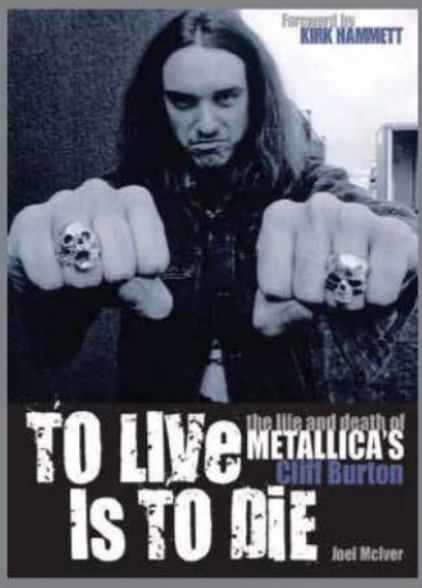

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PLAY LIKE

Martin Turner

The Wishbone Ash bassist could cover driving blues and melodic prog. Gareth Morgan dives in

Bass Techniques

When discussions at the local hostelry inevitably reach the subject of classic British rock bands of the early '70s, the name Wishbone Ash doesn't feature as heavily as some others. It's a shame, as the band is just as deserving of a place at the top table as any of their more esteemed peers. Why? Partly because it was Wishbone Ash who, way back in 1970, pioneered the harmony twin lead guitar approach, a gauntlet later taken up by the likes of Thin Lizzy and Iron Maiden.

Martin Turner, one of the band's founding members, was also their bass player and lead vocalist. Born in Torquay, Devon, on 1 October 1947, Turner took up guitar aged 14, switching to bass two years later as his brother Glenn also played guitar and they needed a bass player for their fledgling band. Steve Upton joined on drums and the trio relocated to London, calling themselves Tanglewood, but neither the name – nor Glenn Turner – lasted very long.

When manager Miles Copeland placed an advert for keyboards and guitar, they ended up with no potential keys players but a tricky choice between two excellent guitarists. The answer was simple: both Andy Powell and Ted Turner were recruited, and Wishbone Ash was born. Their first two albums, *Wishbone Ash* (1970) and *Pilgrimage* (1971) sold well, but the band's commercial peak came when 1972's *Argus* reached number three.

It wasn't all downhill from there – the band had decent success in the States in the late '70s – but the line-up became increasingly unstable from 1980 onwards. Turner quit in that year, then again in 1991 and finally for good in 1996, amidst the usual double-dealings and recriminations. There are currently two versions of Wishbone Ash touring and recording, one featuring Powell and the other Turner.

Known for his aggressive, melodic approach, Turner played basses by Futurama, Rickenbacker and Fender before settling on the Gibson Thunderbird with which he is most closely associated. 'It lets me get very physical with it.... I like to have to fight a bass,' he observed, and tonally it suits Turner's preference for muscular melodies with a fat bottom end and plenty of snappy clarity. As Wishbone Ash were influenced by classic rock as well as progressive rock and folk Turner had plenty of opportunities to be creative and his grounding on guitar meant that he was often more adventurous than a bassist in a rock band is expected to be. You'll get a flavour of that from this month's workshop, which examines material culled from the first three studio albums.

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Ex 1: Primary folk roots

4/4 Time

Martin Turner may have made himself a name as one of the more melodically-inclined bassists around, but he could be quite happy to sit on a simple root-note pattern. Our first example provides good evidence of this. It's an approximation of the bass part from the *Valediction* (from *Pilgrimage*), a drifty, folk-influenced song with harmony vocals and chiming guitars. This is the bass part distilled in its simplest form, and elsewhere on the song (in fact, from the intro onwards) the original is much busier, with plenty of forwards-pushing fills, connecting runs and artful grace notes.

Ex 2: Secrets I'm yet to find

4/4 Time

Paul McCartney was an inescapable influence on the majority of British bassists of the early '70s. Turner is one of them, and there's another close connection – they both sing and play. Of course, Turner was anything but a Macca clone, and would never have dreamed of lifting a lick wholesale, but you can hear certain similarities in the way he uses melodic hooks and in his willingness to go up to the upper registers. This example is based on one of the variations Turner plays on *Leaf And Stream* (*Argus*), a song where he blends warm root notes with subtle descending high harmonies.

Ex 3: Sightless shuffle

4/4 Time

As well as proudly displaying their folk roots, much of Wishbone Ash's early material is strongly influenced by blues. Most of their bluesy material was delivered via up-tempo shuffle grooves, and Turner always dealt with it effortlessly. This example is based on *Blind Eye* (from *Wishbone Ash*), a classic bar-room boogie heavily informed by the British blues boom and driven in classic manner by piano, lots of well-rehearsed twin-guitar riffs and plenty of tightly-planned stop-start hooks. Turner's bass playing ticks all the right boxes, and the target tempo is pretty brisk.

Ex 4: Bedtime instrumental

4/4 Time

The twin guitar element of Wishbone Ash was often used to create melodic features, frequently repeating or reinforcing a vocal melody, but there are good examples of this interaction taking place alone and in a very sophisticated manner. Check out the dreamy instrumental ballad *Lullaby* (from *Pilgrimage*) with its interlocking clean guitars, folkie underpinnings and fragmented, classically-informed harmonies. There's no drums or percussion on this one but Turner delivers another solid bass part with plenty of neat variations, one of which we've tried to get you close to here.

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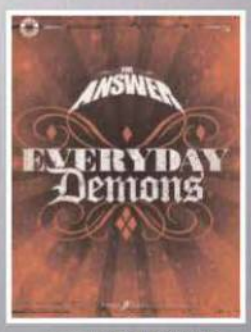

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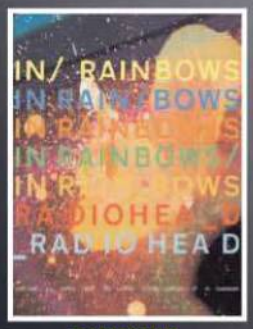

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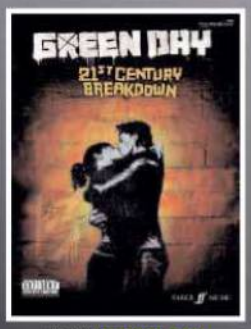

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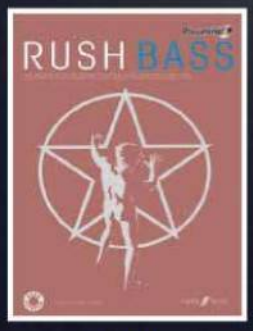

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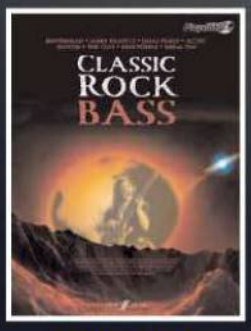

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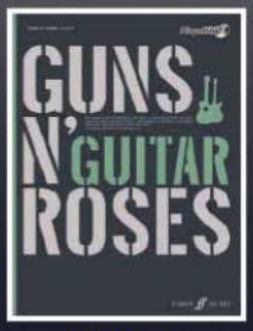

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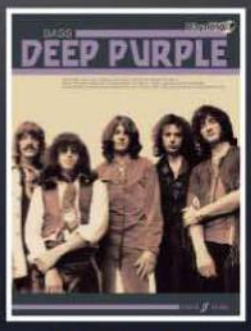

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Ex 5: Useful feature

4/4 Time

As with many of their predecessors and peers, some of Wishbone Ash's songs took the form of extended jams, and the six-minute tune *Handy* from their eponymous debut is a prime example. Turner gets three solos on it, with the first two using a lot of open-string drone ideas with classical and folk references to suit the feel of the associated sections. At just over eight minutes into the piece, Upton's drum solo ushers in a jazz blues section which provides Turner with the perfect platform for his third solo. He kicks it off with a high-register lick similar to the one above.

Ex 6: If seven were four

7/4 Time

Even though they were partial to letting a song expand naturally, most of Wishbone Ash's longer numbers were tightly arranged, which was very much in keeping with their progressive rock outlook. There is more evidence of this in melodic break-downs in odd-meter (*Lady Whiskey, Wishbone Ash*) and in odd-meter grooves, of which *The Pilgrim* (*Pilgrimage*) is a prime example. This one's in 7/4; on one hand it's straightforward as the bass part clearly marks out the time signature, but the downside is that it's not an easy figure to play, as our tribute shows.

Ex 7: Cast away your fears

4/4 Time

When Turner was presented with the job of backing a unison twin-guitar lick his approach wasn't to just blindly regurgitate what Powell and Ted Turner were playing. He'd often take care to vary the harmony, perhaps cleverly dropping out of the unison at a certain point or, as on the pounding *Jail Bait* (*Pilgrimage*), playing a different lick over the second half as a variation. Check out our version: bar one is a straight bluesy unison and bar two is mainly a tricky triplet fill based on the pentatonic scale. You'll find it requires some care and attention if you're going to play it cleanly.

Ex 8: Global maybe

4/4 Time

For our final example we thought we'd give you a taste of the prominent bass melody from *Sometime World*, a tune from the classic *Argus* album. This bass part kicks in together with the tempo changes around the 2:49 mark. Our version looks extra-scary as we've written it in double time, and you'll find it a challenge to really nail it accurately. You'll also need to soup up your sound (a little distortion might help) and make sure you attack this one with plenty of aggression (or a pick if possible). The key here is in organising the fingers of your fretting hand and, as always, practising it slowly.

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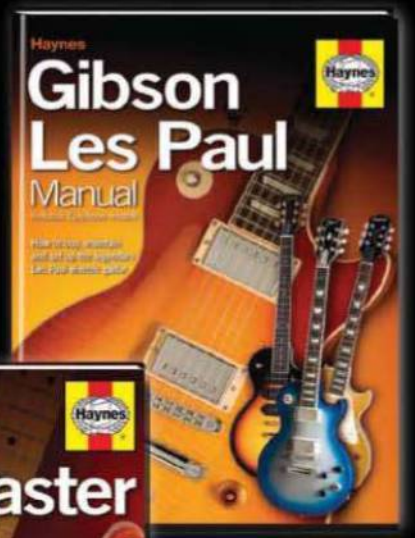

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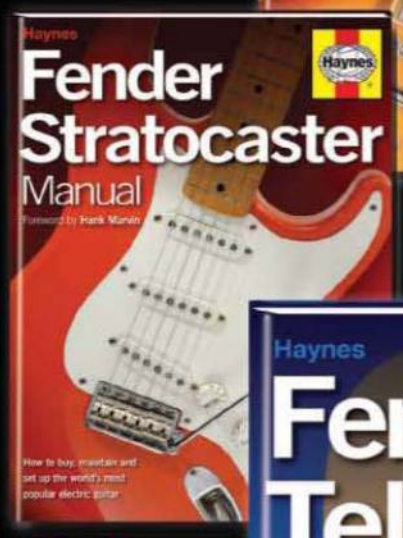

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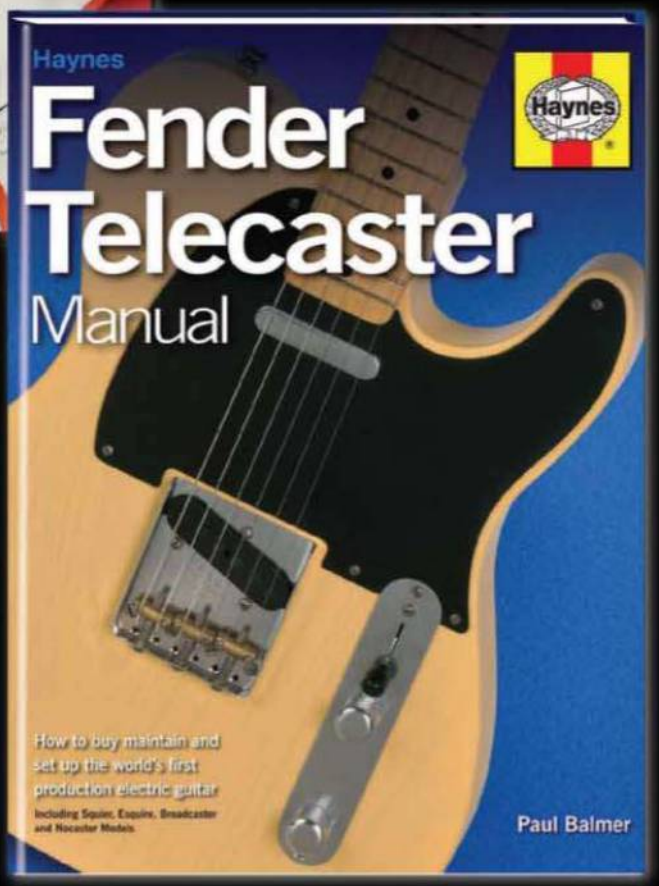

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Back Stage: Did you know this month...

Photo: Corbis

8 December 2004: The guitar world loses a shining star when metal maestro 'Dimebag' Darrell is shot dead while performing on stage. 'Dimebag' Darrell Lance Abbott was a man of many talents: as well as forming groove metal pioneers Pantera, and later Damageplan with his brother, he also turned his ample ability to country music in a group called Rebel Meets Rebel as well as writing a column in a guitar magazine. He was shot while performing at the Alrose Villa in Columbus, Ohio with Damageplan by a gunman called Nathan Gale. Gale was eventually shot himself, but not before he had mown down a further three people. Theories as to why Gale committed the murder ranged from an angry response to the break-up of Pantera to the belief that Abbot had stolen his lyrics. Gale's own writings suggest it was more likely to be his paranoid schizophrenia leading him to believe that the band were 'stealing his thoughts'. Dimebag played Dean guitars, his most famous being his signature 'Dean From Hell'. By pure coincidence, the shooting occurred on the same day as the assassination of John Lennon 24 years earlier.

7 December 2007: Gibson unveils the Robot, the world's first guitar to feature robot technology. While auto-tuning technology was around before its inception, the Robot was the first to use the Powertune system, built by a German company, Tronical, which employs microprocessors instead of cams and cantilevers. The guitar miraculously tunes itself using a data transmitting tailpiece and a tiny circuit board housed beneath the bridge. Piezo saddles on the modified tune-o-matic bridge transmit each string's pitch to the microprocessor, which analyses the signal and tells the 'robot' tuners to begin their magic. There's already a host of celebrity fans including Steve Vai, Matt Bellamy and Pete Townshend. It's also likely to be the only Gibson that will ever be available in an retina-scorching blue silverburst.

29 December 1962: the Ventures release *The 2000 Pound Bee*, widely considered to be the first song recorded using a fuzz pedal. This hit single

featured a revolutionary new unit that created a 'buzzing' distorted guitar sound. The Ventures asked pedal steel player and electronics whizz Red Rhodes to design it for them (Rhodes was also reportedly working on a commercial design for Maestro). The *VH-1 Music First Encyclopedia of Rock Stars* lists the single as the first-ever recorded song to use a fuzzbox, and although there are certainly other contenders for that crown, one thing's certain - the song helped define the emerging sound of fuzz in the '60s. Dan Ackroyd played the record at John Belushi's funeral after the Blues Brothers pledged that whoever went first would play it for the other. The Ventures have also been lucky in fuzz: they've been together for a staggering 49 years without a break.

1 December 1976: The Sex Pistols become an overnight sensation when they swear live on the *Today* programme. The Pistols left the nation open-mouthed by firing out a barrage of expletives during the interview. Steve Jones was the main culprit, swearing at host Bill Grundy after he had jokingly said to a female Pistols entourage member (none other than Siouxsie Sioux) 'We'll meet after, shall we?' The following day, the Daily Mirror led with the famous 'The Filth And The Fury!' headline. The furore surrounding the episode played havoc with the band's tour, and 13 of the 16 dates were cancelled. Town councillors in Derby even asked for a private performance in order to evaluate the group, which they (obviously) turned down. Although EMI cashed in, chairman John Read released a statement that read 'We will do everything we can to restrain [the band's] public behaviour, although this is a matter over which we have no real control.' EMI parted company with the group shortly afterwards. While the incident catapulted the Pistols to fame, Thames TV suspended Grundy and his career never recovered.

23 December 1987: Mötley Crüe bassist Nikki Sixx overdoses on heroin in Slash's hotel room. Though officially 'dead' for two minutes while in the ambulance on the way to hospital, through a stroke of luck the paramedic was a fan of the band and reportedly said 'No-one's gonna die in my ambulance' before administering the two adrenaline shots to Sixx's heart that saved his life. *Kickstart My Heart* from the 1989 album *Dr Feelgood* was inspired by this brush with the reaper. Sixx is currently recording with his new project Sixx:Am.

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Buying a power supply for your pedals and putting them all on a proper pedalboard. Goodbye flat batteries and cheap, crackly leads. Hello, reliable sonic joy

Discovering that the new neighbour's a Strat player too and she knows loads of cool licks. Of course, the love of music is the only reason you keep hopping over the fence. Why else?

Selling some stuff you never use and buying something you will. We all know someone who regrets selling a guitar - but that's no reason to keep that tuba, squeezebox or vibraphone you never did get around to learning. Let someone else love the thing

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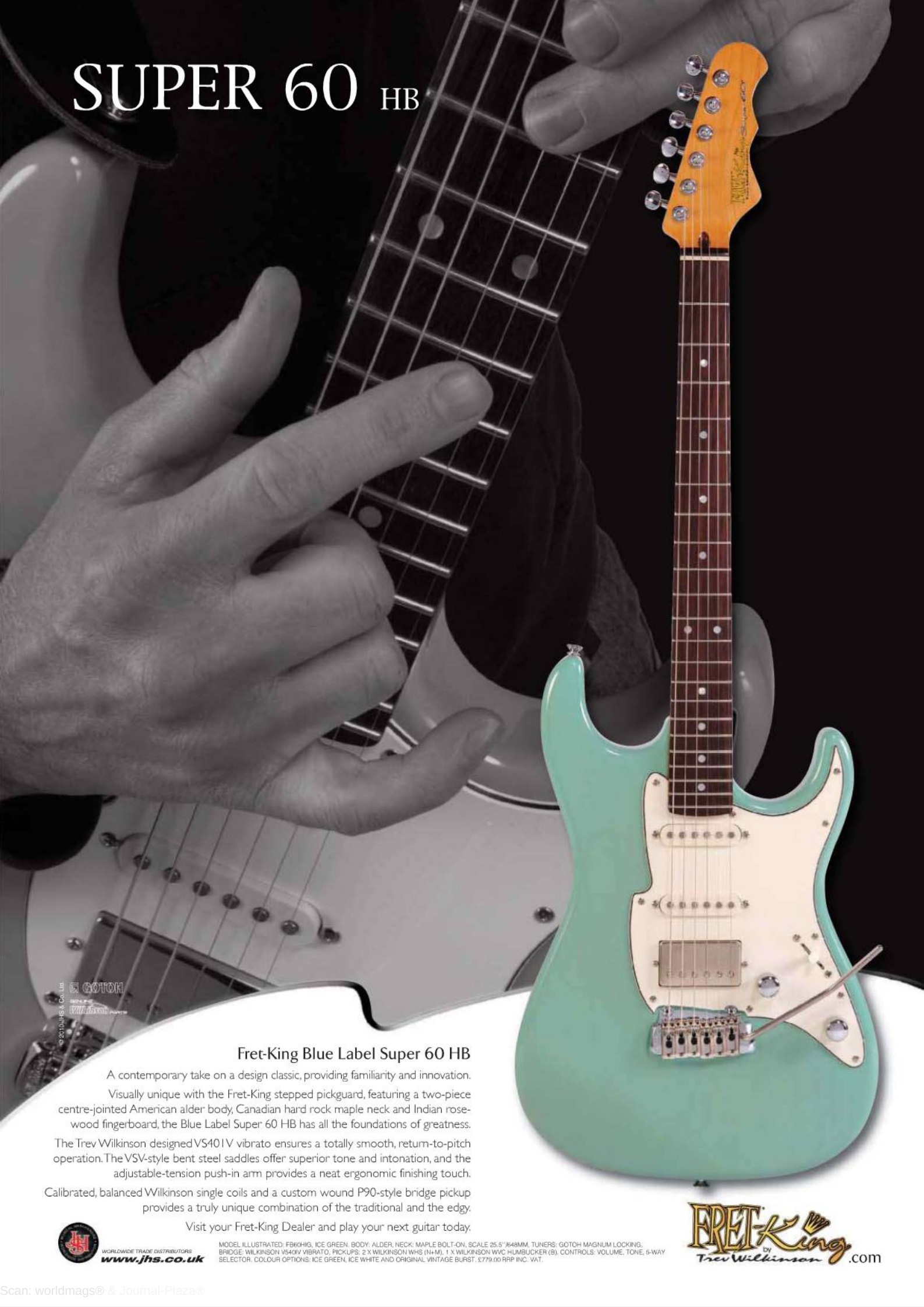

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